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IN GREAT WATERS

Four Stories

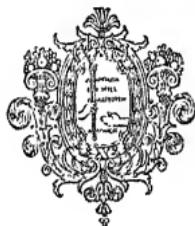
By

THOMAS A. JANVIER

Author of

"The Uncle of an Angel" "The Aztec Treasure-House"
"The Passing of Thomas" "In Old New York" etc.

ILLUSTRATED



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The Wrath of the Zuyder Zee

The Wrath of the Zuyder Zee

I

OLD Jaap Visser was mad. Out there on the island of Marken, in the Zuyder Zee, he was the one madman, and a curiosity. The little boys—all born web-footed, and eager as soon as they could walk to toddle off on their stout little Dutch legs and take to the water—used to run after him and jeer at him. An underlying fear gave zest to this amusement. The older of them knew that he could lay a strange binding curse upon people. The younger of them, resolving this concept into simpler terms, knew that he could say something that would hurt more than a spanking; and that would keep on hurting, in some unexplained but dreadful way, beyond the sting of the worst spanking that ever they had known. Therefore, while they jeered, they jeered circumspect-

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ly. Out in the open—on the brick-paved pathways which traverse the low marsh-land and unite the little knolls on which are the villages: the Hafenbeurt (where the harbour is), the Kerkehof, and the Kesbeurt—butter would not melt in their small Dutch mouths when they met him. But when they had him at their mercy among the houses of one or another of the villages things went differently. Then they would yell “Old Jaap!” “Mad old Jaap!” after him—and as he turned upon them would whip off their sabots, that they might run the more lightly, and would dash around corners into safety: with delightful thrills of dread running through their small scampish bodies at the thought of the curse that certainly was flying after them, and that certainly would make them no better than dead jelly-fish if they did not get around the corner in time to ward it off! And old Jaap would be left free for a moment from his tormentors, brandishing his staff in angry flourishes and shouting his strange curse after them: “May you perish in the wrath of the Zuyder Zee!”

The young men and women of Marken, who never had known old Jaap save as a madman, felt toward him much as the children

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did; though as they got older, and came to understand the cause of his madness and the effectiveness of his curse, their dread of him was apt to take on a more serious cast. Even Krelis Kess, a notorious daredevil in all other directions, and for a long while one of old Jaap's most persistent tormentors, came in the end to treat him with a very obliging civility. But then, to be sure, Marretje de Witt was old Jaap's granddaughter—and everybody in Marken knew that this gentle Marretje, because of her very unlikeness to him it was supposed, had made capture of Krelis Kess's much too vagrant heart. One person, it is true, did dissent from this view of the matter, and that was Geert Thysen—who declared that Krelis was too much of a man really to care for a pale-faced thing fit only to marry another oyster like herself. And Geert's black eyes would snap, and her strong white teeth would show in a smile that was not a pleasant one as she added: “A live man who knows the nip of gin-and-water does not waste his time in drinking weak tea!” But then, to quote the sense of the island folk again, everybody in Marken knew that to win Krelis’s love for herself Geert Thysen would have given those bold black

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eyes of hers, and would have said thank you, too!

Among the old people of Marken, who had known old Jaap before his madness came upon him, a very different feeling prevailed. They dreaded him, of course, because they knew what his curse could accomplish; but, also, they sorrowed for him—remembering the cruel grief which had come upon him in his youth suddenly and had driven him mad. Well enough, they said, might he call down his strange curse upon those who angered him, for twice had he known the bitterness of it: when death, and again worse than death, had struck at that which was dearer than the very heart of him through the wrath of the Zuyder Zee.

It all had happened so long back that only the old people had knowledge of it—in the great storm out of the Arctic Ocean which had driven into the Zuyder Zee the North Sea waters; and there had banked them up, higher and higher, until the whole island of Marken was flooded and half the dykes of the mainland were overrun. Old Jaap—who was young Jaap, then—was afloat at his fishing when the storm came on, and his young wife and her baby were alone at home. In her fear for him she came down

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from the Kerkehof, where their home was, to the Hafenbeurt; and there, standing upon the sea-wall that shelters the little harbour, watching for him, was the last that ever was seen of her alive. When his schuyt came in she had vanished—caught away by the up-leaping sea. That was bad enough, but worse followed. A month later, when he was at his fishing again—glad to be at work, that in the stress of it he might a little forget his sorrow—his net came up heavy, and in it was his dead wife.

Then it was that his madness fell upon him. By the time that he was come back to Marken—sailing his schuyt for a long night through the dark waters with that grewsomely ghastly lading—he was a crazed man.

II

The shadow that rested on Jaap Visser's mind was a deep melancholy that for the most part kept him silent, yet that was broken now and then by outbursts of rage in which he raved against the cruel wickedness of the sea. It did not unfit him for work. He had his living to make; and he made it, as all the men of Marken made their living, by fishing. But those who

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sailed with him in his schuyt said that always as the net came home he hauled upon it with tight-shut eyes; that always, as it was drawn inboard, he turned away—until the thrashing of the fish and some word about the catch from his companions assured him that he might look without fear of such a sight as that which had flashed burning through his eyes and had turned his brain.

When he was on land he spent little time in his own home: of which, and of the baby motherless, his mother had taken charge. Usually he was to be found within or lingering near the graveyard that lies between the Kerkehof and the Hafenbeurt: an artificial mound, like those whereon the several villages on the island are built, raised high enough to be above the level of the waters which cover Marken in times of great storm. Before this strange habit of his had become a matter of notoriety, a dozen or more of the islanders, as they passed at night along the path beside the graveyard, had been frightened pretty well out of their wits by seeing his tall figure rise from among the graves suddenly and stand sharply outlined against the star-gleam of the sky.

But in those days, as I have said, his mad-

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ness was no more than a sombre melancholy—save for his fitful outbursts of rage against the sea. The bitterness that came into his heart came later: when his daughter was a woman grown and Jan de Witt married her—and presently deserted her, as was known openly, for an Edam jade over on the mainland. Things went worse and worse for a while: until one day when old Jaap—even then they were beginning to call him old Jaap—fell into a burning rage with his son-in-law and cursed him as he deserved for the scoundrel that he was.

It was down at the dock that the two men came together. The schuyts were going out, and Jan was aboard his own boat making ready to cast off. Half the island folk were there—the fishermen about to sail, and their people come to see them get away. Some one—who did not see old Jaap standing on the piling near where Jan's boat lay—called out: “The fishing is good off Edam still, eh, Jan?” And then there was a general laugh as Jan answered, laughing also: “Yes, there's good fishing off Edam—better than there is nearer home.”

At this old Jaap broke forth into a passionate outburst against his son-in-law: calling him by all the evil names that he could get together,

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crying out against his wickedness and his cruelty, and ending—as Jan's boat slid away from her moorings, with Jan standing at the tiller laughing at the old man's fury—by calling out with a deep grave energy, in strange contrast with his previous angry ravings: “God cannot and will not forgive. He will judge you and He will punish you. In His name I say to you: May the might of the angered waters be upon you—may you perish in the wrath of the Zuyder Zee!”

There was such a majesty in old Jaap's tone as he spoke those words, and such intense conviction, that all who heard him were thrilled strangely. Some of the old men of Marken, who were there that day, still will tell you that it seemed as though they heard the voice of one who truly was the very mouth-piece of God. Even Jan, they say, paled a little; but only for a moment—and then he was off out of the harbour with a jeer and a laugh.

But that was Jan's last laugh and jeer at his father-in-law, and his last sight of Marken. The next day the boats came hurrying home before a storm, but Jan's boat did not come with them. At first it was thought that he had put into the canal leading up to Edam—it was

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about there that the other fishermen had lost sight of him—but a couple of days later his boat drifted ashore, bottom upward, in the bight of Goudzee south of Monnikendam. That left room for guess-work. Certainty came at the end of a fortnight: when the two men who had been with him got back to Marken—after a trip to England in the steamer that had picked them up afloat—and told how the schuyt had gone over in the gale and spilt them all out into the sea. As for Jan, he never came back at all. As he and the other two men were thorough good sailors, and as the survivors themselves were quite at a loss to account for their catastrophe, there was only one way to explain the matter: old Jaap's curse had taken effect!

After that old Jaap had a place still more apart from the other islanders. What he had done to one he could do to another, it was whispered—and thenceforward he was both shunned and dreaded because of the power for life and death that was believed to be his. The reflex of this popular conviction seemed to find a place in his own heart, and now and again he would threaten with his curse those who got at odds with him. But he never uttered it; and the fact was observed that even in the

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case of the teasing little boys he was careful not to curse any one of his tormentors by name.

III

Certainly, if ever old Jaap had cursed any particular little boy it would have been Krelis Kess—who was quite the worst boy on the island, and who usually was the leader of the troop that hung about the old man's heels.

And even when Krelis got to be a big young fellow of twenty—old enough to go on escapades in Amsterdam of which the rumour, coming back to Marken, made all steady-going folk on the island look askance at him—he still took an ugly pleasure, as occasion offered, in stirring up old Jaap's wrath. If the old man chanced to pass by while he was sitting of a Sunday afternoon in Jan de Jong's tavern, drinking more gin-and-water than was good for him, it was one of his jokes to call out through the open window “Mad old Jaap!” in the shrill voice of a child; and to repeat his cry, with different inflections but always in the same shrill tones, until the old man would go off into a fury and shout his curse at the little boys who seemed to be so close about him but who could

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not anywhere be seen. At that Krelis would fall to laughing mightily, and so would the loose young fellows his companions—who had found out that that would send his hand to his pocket and give them free drinks all around.

Under such conditions it is not surprising that the wonder, and also the regret, of these young scapegraces was very great when on a certain Sunday afternoon in mid-spring time Krelis not only did not volunteer his usual pleasantry at old Jaap's expense—as the old man came shambling up the narrow street toward the tavern—but actually refused to practise it when it was suggested to him. And the wonder grew to be blank astonishment, a minute later, when he went to the window and begged Herr Visser to come in and have a glass of schnapps with him! To hear old Jaap called “Herr Visser” by anybody was enough to stretch to the widest any pair of Marken ears; but to hear him addressed in that stately fashion by Krelis Kess was enough to make any Marken man believe that his ears had gone crazy!

At first the young scamps in the tavern were quite sure that Krelis was about to play some new trick on old Jaap, and that this wonderful politeness was the beginning of it. But the

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marvel increased when the old man—who liked schnapps as well as anybody—joined the little company of tosspots and was treated by Krelis with as much respect as though he had been a burgomaster! And more than that, when the session was ended—and old Jaap, to whom such treats came rarely, was so far fuddled that he could not manage his legs easily—Krelis said that nothing could be pleasanter than a walk across to the Kerkehof in the cool of the evening, and so gave him a steadyng arm home. As the two set off together the young fellows left behind stared at each other in sheer amazement; and such of the Marken folk as chanced to meet this strangely assorted couple marching amicably arm in arm together were inclined to disbelief in their own eyes!

For a week, while they all were away at their fishing, there was a lull in the excitement; but it was aroused again the next Sunday when Krelis did not come as usual to the tavern—and went to a white heat when a late arrival, a young fellow who lived in the Kerkehof, told that as he came past Jaap Visser's house he had seen Krelis sitting on the bench in front of it talking away with old Jaap and making eyes behind old Jaap's back at Marret-

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je. At first, being so entirely incredible, this statement was scouted scornfully; but it aroused so lively a discussion that presently the whole company left the tavern and went over in a body to the Kerkehof bent upon disproving or verifying it—and there, sure enough, were old Jaap and Krelis smoking their pipes together, and Marretje along with them, on the bench in front of old Jaap's door!

Young Jan de Jong—the son of the tavern-keeper—expressed the feelings of the company when he said, later, that as they stood there looking at that strange sight you might have knocked down the whole of them with the flirt of a skate's tail! But they did not stop long to look at it. Krelis glared at them so savagely, and his big fists doubled up in so threatening a fashion, that they took themselves off in a hurry—and back to the tavern to talk it over, while they bathed their wonder in very lightly watered gin.

IV

That was the beginning of Krelis Kess's courting of Marretje de Witt—about which, in a moment, all the island blazed with talk. Until then, in a light-loving way, Krelis had been

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keeping company with Geert Thysen. That seemed a natural sort of match, for Geert and Krelis had much the same bold way with them and well enough might have paired. But Geert, like Krelis, had a devil of a temper, and it was supposed that an angry spat between them had sent Krelis flying off in a rage from her spit-firing—and that the gentle Marretje had caught his heart on the rebound. The elders, reasoning together out of their worldly wisdom, perceived that under the law of liking for unlike this bold-going young fellow very well might be drawn toward a maiden all gentleness; and that, because of her gentleness, Marretje would find a thrilling pleasure in the strong love-making with which Krelis would strive to take her heart by storm. All that, as they knew, was human nature. Had they known books also they would have cited the case of Desdemona and the Moor.

However, there was not much time for talking. Krelis was not of the sort to let grass grow under his feet in any matter, and in a love matter least of all. Nor were there any obstacles to bar his way. He had his own boat, that came to him when his father was drowned; and he had his own house in the Kesbeurt, where he had lived alone since his mother had ended

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a notably short widowhood by marrying a second time. Old Jaap, moreover, was ready enough to accept as a son-in-law the only man in Marken who ever had styled him Herr Visser, and who in addition to that unparalleled courtesy had given him in quick succession nearly a dozen bottles of the best Schiedam. There was nothing to hinder the marriage, therefore, but Marretje's shyness—and Krelis overcame that quickly in his own masterful way.

And so everybody saw that matters were like to come quickly to a climax—everybody, that is, except Geert Thysen, who said flatly that the marriage was both impossible and absurd. Geert had her own notion that Krelis was serving her out for her hard words to him, and was only waiting for a soft word to come back to her—and she bit those full red lips of hers with her strong teeth and resolved that she would keep him waiting until he was quite in despair. Then, at the very last, she would whistle him back to her—with a laugh in his face first, and then such a kiss as all the Marretjes in the world could not give him—and the comedy of his mock courtship would be at an end. Sometimes, to be sure, the thought did cross her mind that Krelis might not come to her whistle.

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Then the color would go out of her red cheeks a little, and as she ground her big white teeth together she would have a half-formed vision of Krelis lying dead somewhere with a knife in his heart. But visions of this sort came seldom, and were quickly banished—with a sharp little laugh at her own folly in fancying even for an instant that Krelis could hesitate in choosing between herself and that limp pale doll.

And then, one day, she found herself face to face with the fact that Krelis had not been playing a comedy at all. The news was all over the island that he and Marretje were to be married the next Sunday; and that he meant to be married handsomely, with a great wedding-feast at Jan de Jong's tavern in Jan de Jong's best style. "So there's an end of your lover for you, Geert Thysen!" said Jaantje de Waard, who brought the news to her.

At this Geert's red cheeks grew a little redder, and her big black eyes had a brighter flash to them; but she only laughed as she answered: "It's one thing to lay the net—but it's another to haul it in!" And Jaantje remembered afterward what a strange look was in her face as she said those strange words.

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V

The wedding was the finest that had been known in Marken for years. At the church the parson gave his “Golden Clasp” address, which was the most beautiful of his three wedding addresses and cost five gulden. Then the company streamed away along the brick-paved pathway from the Kerkehof to the Hafenbeurt, with the sunshine gleaming gallantly on the white caps and white aprons of the women and on the shiny high hats of the men, while the wind fluttered the little Dutch flags—and they all walked much more steadily than they did when they took their after-breakfast walk, before the dancing began. In that second walk the men’s legs wavered a good deal, and some of them had trouble in steering the stems of their long pipes to their mouths. But that is not to be wondered at when you think what a breakfast it was! Jan de Jong fairly excelled himself. They talk about it in Marken to this day!

While the wedding-party walked unsteadily abroad the big room in the tavern was cleared; and when the company was come back again, much the better for fresh air and exercise, the

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dancing began. And just then a very queer thing happened: Krelis led off the dance with Geert Thysen instead of with Marretje his bride!

Some say that Geert made him promise to do this as the price of her coming to the wedding; others say that it was done on the spur of the moment—was one of Geert's sudden whims that Krelis, who also was given to sudden whims, fell in with. About the truth of this matter there can be only guess-work, but about what happened there is plain fact: Just as the set was forming, Krelis dropped Marretje's hand and said lightly: "You won't mind, Marretje, will you? It's for old friendship's sake, you know." And with that he took the hand of Geert Thysen, who was standing close beside him, and away he went with her in the dance. Those who think that it had been arranged between them beforehand point out that Geert had refused all offers to dance and had come close to Krelis just as the set was formed. There is something in that, I think. But whether they had planned it or had not planned it, the fact remains that Marretje's place at the head of the dance at her own wedding was taken by another woman; and as the set was complete

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without her, she did not dance at all until the first figure came to an end. They say that there were tears in her eyes as she stood alone there—and that she was very white when Krelis took her hand again, at the end of the first figure, and gave her for the rest of the dance the place at the head of it that was hers. They say, too, that Geert stood watching them—when Krelis had left her and had taken his bride again—with a hot blaze of color coming and going in her cheeks, and with a wonderful flashing and sparkling of her great black eyes. And before the dance ended Geert went home.

There was a great crackling of talk, of course, about this slight that Krelis had put upon Marretje on her wedding - day ; and people shook their heads and said that worse must come after it. Some of the stories about Krelis's escapades in Amsterdam were raked up again and were pointed with a fresh moral. As for Geert, the Marken women had but one opinion of her—and the least unkindly expression of it was that she was walking in a very dangerous path. But when echoes of this talk came to Geert's ears — as they did, of course — she merely curled her red lips a little and said that as she was neither a weak woman nor a fool-

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ish woman she was safe to walk where she pleased.

VI

It was a little disconcerting to the prophets of evil that the weeks and the months slipped away without any signs of the fulfilment of their prophecies. However keen may have been Marretje's sorrow on her wedding-day, it was not lasting. Indeed, her gentle nature was so filled with a worshipping love for Krelis that he had only to give her a single light look of affection or a half-careless kiss to fill her whole being with happiness. He was a god to her—this gayly daring young fellow who had raised her up to be a shy little queen in a queendom, she was sure, such as never had been for any other woman in all the world. And Krelis was very well pleased with her frank adoration. It was tickling to his vanity that she should be so completely and so eagerly his loving slave.

Next to her love for Krelis—and partly because it was a part of her love for him—Marretje's greatest joy was in her housekeeping. She had taken a just pride in the tidiness of

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her housekeeping for her grandfather; but it was a very different and far more exciting matter to furbish and polish a house that really was her own. And Krelis's house, of which she was the proud mistress, was far bigger and far finer than her old home. It was a stately dwelling, for Marken, standing on an out-jutting ridge of earth at the back of the Kesbeurt, close upon a delightful little canal—and from the back doorway was a restful far-off outlook over the marsh-land to the level horizon of the Zuyder Zee. Marretje loved that outlook, and she had it before her often: for down beside the canal was her scouring - shelf—where she scoured away through long sunny mornings, while Krelis was away at his fishing, until her pots and kettles ranged in the sunlight shone like burnished gold.

Yet the fact should be added that when the old men of Marken talked together about this fine house of Krelis Kess's they would shake their heads a little—saying that a better spending of money would have been for a smaller house founded on solid piling, instead of for this showy dwelling standing on an out-thrust earth bank which well enough might crumble away beneath it in some time of tremendous

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tempest when all the island should be overswept and beaten by the sea.

For the most part, of course—save for little chats with her neighbours—Marretje was alone in that fine house of hers. Old Jaap had come to live with the young people—as was only fair, since he had no one but his granddaughter to care for him—but both he and Krelis spent all their week-days afloat at their fishing and only their Sundays at home. Yet now and then the old man, making some excuse for not going out with the fleet, would give himself a turn at shore duty; and would sit in his big chair, smoking his long pipe very contentedly, watching his granddaughter at her endless scouring and cleaning, and listening to her little bursts of song. In his unsettled old mind he sometimes fancied that the years had rolled backward and that he was watching his own young wife again; and in his old heart he would dream young love-dreams by the hour together—blessedly forgetting that the love and the happiness which had made his life beautiful had been snatched away from him and lost forever in the wrathful waters of the Zuyder Zee.

But Marretje's love-dreams were living ones. As Krelis lounged over his pipe of a Sunday

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morning, taking life easily in his clean Sunday clothes, he would say an airy word or two in praise of her housekeeping that fairly would set her to blushing with happiness—and what with the colour in her fair face and the light in her blue eyes she would be so entirely charming that Krelis's own eyes would go to sparkling, and he would draw her close to him and fondle her in a genuinely loverlike fashion that would fill her with a very tender joy. Krelis was quite sincere in his love-making. His little Marretje's soft beauty, and her shy delight in his caresses, went down into an unsounded depth and touched an unknown strain of gentleness in his easy-going heart.

But even on the first Sunday after they were married Krelis went off after dinner—it had been a wonder of a dinner that Marretje had cooked for him: she had been planning it the week through!—to join his companions as usual at Jan de Jong's. This came hard on Marretje. She had been counting so much on that afternoon! A dozen little tender confidences had been put aside during the morning to be made then comfortably: when the dinner things would all be cleared away, and her grandfather would have gone to take his usual Sunday look at his

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boat, and she and Krelis would be sitting at their ease—delightfully alone together for the first time in their lives!

She had thought it all out, and had arranged in her own mind that they would sit on the steps above her scouring-shelf—at the back of the house and hidden away from everybody—with the canal at their feet, and in front of them the level loneliness of the marsh-land stretching away and losing itself in the level loneliness of the sea. She had a cushion all ready for Krelis to sit on, and a smaller cushion for herself that was to go on the next lower step—and she blushed a little to herself as she thought how she would make a back to lean against out of Krelis's big knees. And then, just as she had finished her clearing away and was getting out the cushions, Krelis put on his hat and said that he thought he would step across to the tavern and have a look at the boys. The boys would laugh at him, he said, if he settled right down into being an old married man—and he tried to give a better send-off to this small pleasantry by laughing at it himself. But he did not laugh very heartily, and he almost turned back again when he got to the bridge—thinking how the light of happiness

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which had made Marretje's face so beautiful through that Sunday morning suddenly had died out of it as he came away. And then he pulled himself together with the reflection that she would be all right again when he got back to her at supper-time, and so went on. When he was come to the tavern he forgot all about Marretje's unhappiness, for the boys welcomed him with a cheer.

Being in this way forsaken, Marretje carried out what was left of her broken plan forlornly—arranging the cushions on the two steps, and sitting on the lower one with her elbow resting on the upper one, and gazing out sorrowfully across the marsh-land and the sea. That great loneliness of sedge and sea and sky made her own loneliness more bitter: and then came the hurting thought that just a week before, very nearly at that same hour, Krelis still more cruelly had forsaken her while he led with Geert Thysen their wedding-dance.

After a while old Jaap came home and seated himself beside her. He was silent, as was his habit, but having him that way soothed and comforted her. As she leaned her head against his shoulder and held his big bony hands the old man went off into one of his

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dream-fancies that his young wife was beside him again—and perhaps, in some subtle way, that also helped to take the sting out of her pain. When Krelis came home at supper-time, walking a little unsteadily, he did not miss her flow of chattering talk that had gone on through the morning; and presently it began again—for Krelis returned in high good-humour, and his fire of pretty speeches and his kisses quickly brought happiness back to her sore little heart. Knowing thereafter what to expect of a Sunday, her pleasure was less lively—but so was her pain.

VII

It was a little past the turn of the half-year after the wedding that the prophets of evil pricked up their ears hopefully—as there began to go humming through Marken a soft buzz of talk about the carryings on of Geert Thysen and Krelis Kess. It was only vague talk, to be sure; but then when talk of that sort is vague there is the more seaway for speculation and inference. All sorts of rumours went flashing about—and carried the more weight, perhaps, because they could not be traced to a starting-

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point and were disavowed by each person who passed them on. The sum of them became quite amazing before long!

In the end, of course, this talk worked around to Marretje. Bit by bit, one kind friend after another brought her variations of the same budget of news, pleading their friendship for her as the excuse for their chattering; and all of them were a good deal disconcerted by the placid way, with scarcely a word of comment, in which she suffered them to talk on. Only when they took to saying harsh things about Krelis did they rouse her a little. Then she would stop them shortly, and with a quiet insistence that put them in an awkward corner, by asking them to remember that it was her husband whom they were talking about, and that what they were saying was not fit for his wife to hear. This line of rejoinder was disconcerting to her interlocutors. To be put in the wrong, that way, while performing for conscience' sake a very unpleasant duty, could not but arouse resentment. Presently it began to be said that Marretje was a poor-spirited thing upon whom friendly sympathy was thrown away.

Perhaps it was because Marretje was not feel-

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ing very strong just then that she took matters so quietly. Certainly she had not much energy to spare, and her days went slowly and heavily. Even on the Sunday mornings when she had Krelis at home with her—and a good many of his Sundays were spent away from the island, in order, as he explained, that he might get off on the Mondays earlier to his fishing—she found it hard to keep up the laughing talk and the light-hearted way with him that he seemed to think always were his due. When she flagged a little he told her not to be sulky—and that cut her sharply, for she thought that he ought to feel in his own heart how very tenderly she was loving him in those days, and how earnestly she was longing for a tender and sustaining love in return.

It is uncertain how much of all this old Jaap understood, but a part of it he certainly did understand. In some matters his clouded brain seemed to work with a curious clearness, and especially had he a strange faculty for getting close to troubled hearts. Many there were in Marken, on whom sorrow had fallen, who had been comforted by his sympathy; and who had found it the more soothing and helpful because it was given with no more than a gentle

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look or a few gentle words. In this same soft way, that asked for no answer and that needed none, he comforted Marretje in that sad time of her loneliness. Many a day, when the other fishermen kept the sea, he kept the land—letting his boat go away to the fishing without him while he made company at home for his granddaughter, and even helped her in the heavier part of her house-work with his big clumsy old hands. These awkward efforts to serve her touched Marretje's heart very keenly—yet also added a pang to her sorrow because of her longing that Krelis might show his love for her in the same way.

But old Jaap had his work to do at sea, and Marretje had to make the best of many and many a weary and lonely day. Being in so poor a way she could busy herself but little with her house-work—nor was there much incentive to scour and polish since Krelis had ceased to commend her housekeeping; and, indeed, was at home so little that he was indifferent as to whether she kept her house well or ill.

And so she spent much of her time as she had spent that first lonely Sunday afternoon—sitting on the steps above her scouring-shelf,

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looking out sadly and dreamily across the marsh-land and the sea. Or she would walk slowly to the end of the village, where rough steps went down to a little-used canal, and there would lean against the rail while she gazed steadfastly across the marshes seaward—trying to fancy that she could see the fishing fleet, and trying to build in her breast little hope-castles in which Krelis again was all her own. They comforted her, these hope-castles: even though always, when the week ended and the fleet was back again, they came crashing down. Sometimes Krelis's boat did not return at all. Sometimes it returned without him. When he did come back in it very little of his idle Sunday was passed at home. The dark months of winter dragged on wearily. Grey chill clouds hung over Marken, and grey chill clouds rested on this poor Marretje's heart.

VIII

But one glad day in the early spring-time the sun shone again—when Krelis bent down over her bed with a look of real love in his bright eyes and kissed her; and then—in a half-fearful way that made her laugh at him with a weak

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little laugh in which there was great happiness —kissed also his little son. “As if his father’s kiss could hurt this great strong boy!” she said in a tone of vast superiority: and held the little atom close to her breast with all the strength of her feeble arms. She loved with a double love this little Krelis: greatly for himself and for the strong thrilling joy of motherhood, but perhaps even more because his coming had brought the other Krelis back again into the deep chambers of her heart.

It was the prettiest of sights, presently, when she was up and about again, to see Marretje standing in front of her own door in the spring sunshine holding this famous little Krelis in her arms. Then, as now, young mothers were common enough in Marken; but there was a look of radiant happiness about Marretje—so the old people will tell you—that made her different from any young mother whom ever they saw. “Her face was as shining as the face of an angel!” one of the old women said to me—when I heard this story told in Marken on a summer day. And this same old woman told me that through that time of Marretje’s great happiness Geert Thysen walked sullen: ready at any moment, without cause or reason,

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to fly out into what the old woman called a yellow rage.

But even from the first the matrons of the island, knowing in such matters, pulled long faces when they talked about the little Krelis among themselves. Krelis Kess's son, they said, should not have been so frail a child; and then they would account for this puny baby by casting back to the time when Marretje was orphaned before she was weaned, and so was started in life without the toughness and sturdiness with which the Marken folk as a rule are dowered. These worthy women had much good advice to give, and gave it freely, as to how the little Krelis should be dealt with to strengthen him; but Marretje paid scant attention to their suggestions, being satisfied in her own mind that this wonderful baby of hers really was—as she had said he was on the day when his father first kissed him—a great strong boy.

Krelis, seeing his little son only once a week, was the first to notice that he was not so strong as a healthy child should be; but when he said so to Marretje she gave him such a rating that he decided he must be all wrong. And then, one day, Geert Thysen opened both his and Marretje's eyes.

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It was a bright Sunday afternoon, when the little Krelis was between two and three months old, that Marretje was sitting with him on her lap, suckling him, on the steps above her scouring-shelf; and Krelis was seated on the step above her, and she really was making a back of his big knees. What with the joy of her motherhood, and her joy because her Krelis was her own again, it seemed to Marretje as though in all the world there was only happiness. She held the little Krelis close to her, crooning a soft song sweetly over the tiny creature nestled to her heart; and as she suckled him there tingled through her breast, and thence through all her being, thrills of that strange subtle ecstasy which only mothers know. And Krelis, in his own way, shared Marretje's great happiness: as they sat there lonely, looking out over the marsh-land seaward, their hearts very near together because of the deep love that was in both of them for their child. Presently Krelis leaned a little forward, and with a touch rarely loving and tender encircled the two in his big arms and drew Marretje still closer against his knees. And they sat there for a while so—in the bright silence of that sunny afternoon, fronting that still outlook over level

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spaces cut only by the level sky-line far away —their two hearts throbbing gently and very full.

A little noise broke the deep silence suddenly, and an instant later Geert Thysen was almost within arm's-length of them—standing in a boat which she had poled very quietly along the canal. Krelis unclasped his arms and drew back quickly; but Marretje bent forward and grasped the little Krelis still more closely, as though to shield him from harm. For a moment there was silence. Krelis flushed and looked uneasy, almost ashamed. There was a dull burning light in Geert's black eyes and her face was pale and drawn. She was the first to speak.

" You're quite right to make the most of your sick baby," she said. " You won't have him long."

" He's not a sick baby," Marretje answered furiously. " He's as strong and well as he can be!"

Geert laughed. " That puny little thing strong and well!" she answered. " Much it is that you know about babies, Marretje! Don't you see how the veins show through his skin? Don't you see the marks under his eyes? Don't

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you see how little he is, and how he don't grow? In another month you'll know more. He'll be over yonder in the graveyard by that time!" And then she flashed a look on Krelis of that sort of hate which comes when love goes wrong as she added: "And it is no more than you deserve, Krelis Kess. You might have had a strong woman for a wife, and then you would have had a strong child!" With that she gave a sudden thrust with the pole that sent her boat flying away from them, and in an instant vanished around a turn in the canal.

IX

Within a week the story of what had happened between them was all over Marken. Geert Thysen herself must have told what she had done. Certainly Krelis did not tell; and Maretje, having no one else to turn to, told only her grandfather. But various versions of the story went about the island, and the comment upon all of them by the Marken folk was the same: that Krelis had played the part of a coward in suffering such words to be spoken to his wife with never a word on his side of reply. Old Jaap, they say, blazed out into one of

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his mad rages against his son-in-law. Some say that he then laid the curse upon him—but that never will be known certainly, for the bout between the two men took place when they were alone.

What is known to be true is that Krelis for a while was as a man stunned; and that when he came to himself again—this was after the little Krelis was laid away in the graveyard—what love he had for Marretje was turned to an angry hatred because she had let his boy die. He said this not only to his neighbours but to Marretje herself—telling her that their child had died because she had borne it weakly into the world and had given it no strength with which to live.

Even a strong woman, being wellnigh heart-broken—as Marretje was when her baby was lost to her—could not have stood up against a blow like that. And Marretje, who was not a strong woman, felt the heart-breaking bitterness of what Krelis said because she knew that it was true. Very soon she was as feeble and as wan as the little Krelis had been. Happiness was no more for her, and she longed only for the forgetfulness of sorrow which would come to her when she should be as the little

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Krelis was. And so her slight hold on life loosened quickly, and presently she and the little Krelis lay in the graveyard side by side.

She had a very nice funeral, so one of the old women in Marken told me: the best bier and the best pall were used, and the minister gave his best address—the one called “The Mourning Wreath”—at the grave. And, to end with, there was a breakfast in Jan de Jong’s tavern—that was of the best too. It was only just to Krelis, the old woman said, to say that in the matter of the funeral he behaved very well indeed.

But one thing which he did at that breakfast showed that it was for his own pride, and not for the sake of Marretje, that everything was done in so fine a style. On Marken there was left no near woman relative of Marretje’s, and when the guests came to the table they were a good deal scandalized by finding that Geert Thysen was to be seated on Krelis’s right hand. Old Jaap’s place was on his left, but when the old man saw who was to take the seat on the right he drew back quickly from the table and left the room.

At that, for a full half-minute there was an awkward pause—until Krelis, in a strong voice,

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bade the company be seated: and added that no one had a better right to the seat beside him than Marretje's oldest friend. As he made this speech a little buzzing whisper went around among the company, and some one even snickered down at the lower end of the big room. But there was the breakfast, as good as it could be, before them. It was much too good a breakfast to lose on a mere point of etiquette. The whispering died out, and for a moment the guests looked at one another in silence—and then there was a great scraping and rattling of chairs as they all sat down. And Krelis and Geert presided over the funeral feast with a most proper gravity—save that now and then a glance passed between them that seemed to have more meaning than was quite decorous in the case of those two: the one being a maiden, and the other a widower whose wife had not been buried quite two hours.

Of course there was a good deal of talk about all this afterward; but as public opinion had been moulded under favourable conditions —while the mellowing influence of the good food and abundant drink was still operative —the talk was not by any means relentlessly harsh. The men openly smiled at the proof

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which Krelis had given that his loss was not irreparable; and the women, with a certain primness, admitted that—after all the talk there had been—Krelis owed it to Geert to marry her with as little delay as the proprieties of the case would allow.

But even this kindly public opinion was strained sharply by the discovery that the marriage was to take place only two months after that funeral feast at which, to all intents and purposes, it had been announced. That was going, the women said, altogether too fast. But the men only laughed again—partly at the way in which the women were standing up for the respect due to their sex, and partly at Krelis's hurry to take on again the bonds from which he had been so very recently set free.

Here and there among the talkers a questioning word would be put in as to how old Jaap would take this move on the part of his son-in-law. But even the few people who bothered their heads with this phase of the matter held that old Jaap never would have a clear enough understanding of it to resent the dishonour put upon his granddaughter's memory. He had returned to his home in the Kerkehof and was living there, in his own queer way, solitary.

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He was madder than ever, people said; and it was certain that he had gone back to his old habit of spending in the graveyard all of the days and many of the nights which he passed ashore. Often those who passed by night between the Hafenbeurt and the Kerkehof saw him there—keeping his strange watch among the graves.

X

What the Marken folk still speak of as “the great storm”—the worst storm of which there is record in the island’s history—set in a good four-and-twenty hours before the December day on which Geert Thysen and Krelis Kess were married. From the Polar ice-fields a rushing and a mighty wind thundered southward over the Arctic Ocean and down across the shallows of the North Sea—sucking away the water from the Baltic, sending a roaring tide out through the English Channel into the Atlantic, and piling higher and higher against the Holland coast a wall of ocean: which broke at the one opening and went pouring onward into the Zuyder Zee.

Already on the morning of that wild wedding-day the waves were lapping high about

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Marken, and here and there a dull gleam of water showed where the marshes were overflowed. Just before daybreak the storm lulled a little, but came on again with a fresh force after the unseen sunrise, and grew stronger and stronger as the black day wore on. Down by the little haven the fishermen were gathered in groups anxiously watching their tossing boats—in dread lest in spite of the doubled and tripled moorings they should fetch away. Steadily from the black sky poured downward sheets of rain.

According to Marken notions, even a landsman should not have ventured to marry on a day like that; and for a fisherman to marry while such a storm was raging was a sheer tempting of all the forces which work together for evil in the tempests of the sea. Every one expected that the wedding would be put off; and when word was passed around that it was not to be put off, all of the older and steadier folk refused with one voice to have anything to do with it. How Krelis succeeded in inducing the minister to perform the ceremony no one ever knew—for the minister was one of the many that day on Marken who never saw the rising of another sun. He was not well

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liked, that minister, and stories not to his credit were whispered about him; at least so one of the old women told me—and more than half hinted that what happened to him was a judgment upon him for his sins.

Even when the wedding-party came across from the Kerkehof to the Hafenbeurt, some little time before mid-day, the marshes on each side of the raised path were marshes no longer, but open water—that was whipped southward before the gale in little angry waves. There was no chance for a show of finery. The men wore their oil-skins over their Sunday clothes, and the women were wrapped in cloaks and shawls. But it was a company of young dare-devils, that wedding-party, and the members of it came on through the storm laughing and shouting—with Geert and Krelis leading and the gayest madcaps of them all. So far from being dismayed by the roaring tempest, those two wild natures seemed only to be stirred and aroused by it to a fierce happiness. They say that Geert never was so beautiful as she was that day—her face glowing with a strong rich colour, her eyes sparkling with a wonderful brilliancy, her full red lips parted and showing the gleam of those strong white teeth of hers, her

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lithe body erect and poised confidently against the furious wind which swept them all forward along the path.

But as the party came near to the graveyard, lying midway between the Kerkehof and the Hafenbeurt close beside the path, some of the young men and women found their merriment oozing out of them. In that day of black storm the rain-sodden mound was inexpressibly desolate. All around it, save for the pathway leading up to its gate, the marsh was flooded. The graveyard almost was an island —would be quite an island should the water rise another foot. Rushed onward by the gale, shrewd little waves were beating against its windward side so sharply that the soft soil visibly was crumbling away—a sight which recalled a dim but very grisly legend of how once a great storm had hurled such a sea upon Marken that the dead bodies lying in that very spot had been torn from their resting-places by the tumultuous waves. But crueler still was the shivering thought of Marretje, only two months dead, lying in that sodden ground in her storm-beaten grave.

And then, as they came closer, the memory of Marretje was brought home to them still

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more sharply and in a strangely startling way: as they saw old Jaap uprise suddenly from where he had been crouched amidst the graves. Bareheaded, with his long grey hair and long grey beard soaked with the falling torrent and flying out before the wind, he stood upright on the crest of the mound close above them—his tall lean figure towering commandingly against the black rain clouds, defiant as some old sea-god of the furious storm.

He seemed to be speaking, but the storm noises were as a wall shutting him off from them, and not until they had passed on a little and were to leeward of him could they hear his words. Then they heard him clearly: speaking slowly, with no trace of anger in his tones but with a strange solemn fervour—as though he felt himself to be out beyond the line which separates Time from Eternity, and from that vantage-point uttered with authority the judgments of an outraged God. It was to Geert and Krelis that he spoke, pointing at them with one outstretched hand while the other was raised as though in invocation toward the wild black sky: “For your sins the anger of God is loosed upon you in His tempests, and in His name I curse you with a binding curse. May

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the raging waters be upon you! May you perish in the wrath of the Zuyder Zee!"

A shudder went through all the wedding company. Even Krelis, half stopping, suddenly paled. Only Geert, bolder than all of them put together, held her own. With a quick motion she drew Krelis onward, and her lip curled in that way of hers as she said to him: "What has old Jaap to do with you or me, Krelis? He is a mad old fool!" And then she looked straight at old Jaap, into the very eyes of him, and laughed scornfully—as they all together went on again through the wind and rain.

But when they came to Jan de Jong's tavern, where the wedding-breakfast was waiting for them, Krelis was the first to call for gin. He said that he was cold.

XI

It was the strangest wedding-feast, they say, that ever was held on Marken: with the black tempest beating outside, and all the lamps in the big room lighted—although the day still was on the morning side of noon. Young Jan de Jong—the same who is old Jan de Jong

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now, and who now keeps the tavern—remembers it all well, and tells how his mother was for bundling the whole company out of doors. Such doings would bring bad luck upon the house, she said—and went up-stairs and locked herself into her room and took to praying when her husband told her that bad luck never came with good money, and that what Krelis was willing to pay for Krelis should have.

But it was the wife who was right that time—as the husband knew a very little later on. For that night Krelis's boat was one of those swept away from their moorings and founder-ed, and Krelis's fine house was undermined by the water and went out over the Zuyder Zee in fragments—and so the wedding - feast never was paid for at all. And she always said that but for her prayers their son would have been lost to them too. Old Jan was very grave when he told me about this—and from some of the others I learned that it was because of what hap-pened to him that night. that he gave over the wild life that he had been leading and became a steady man.

At first, what with the blackness of the storm and the ringing in everybody's ears of old Jaap's curse, the company was a dismal one. But the

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plentiful hot gin-and-water that Krelis ordered—and led in drinking—soon brought cheerfulness back again. As for Geert, she had no need of gin-and-water: her high spirits held from first to last. Seated on Krelis's right—just as she had been seated only a little while before on the day of Marretje's funeral—she rattled away steadily with her gay talk; and every now and then, they say, turned to Krelis with a look that brought fire into his eyes!

The walk after breakfast was out of the question. As the afternoon went on the storm raged more and more tumultuously. There was nothing for it but to have the room cleared of the chairs and table and go straight on to the dancing; and that they did—excepting some of the weaker-headed ones, whose legs were too badly tangled for such gay exercise and who sat limply on the benches against the wall.

This time it was not by favour but by right that Geert led the dance with Krelis—her black eyes shining and her face all of a rich red glow. And as she took her place at the head of it she said to Jaantje de Waard: “Who’s got him now, this lover of mine you said I’d lost, Jaantje? Didn’t I tell you that it’s one thing

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to lay the net, but it's another to haul it in?" And away she went, caught close to Krelis, with a laugh on those red lips of hers and a brighter sparkle in her black eyes. Jaantje said—it was she who told me, an old woman now—that somehow this speech of Geert's, and the sudden thought that it brought of dead Marretje out there in the graveyard, made her feel so queasy in her stomach that she left the dance and went home bare-headed through the storm.

The dancing, with plenty of drink between whiles, went on until evening; and after night-fall the company grew still merrier — partly because of the punch, but more because the feast lost much of its grewsomeness when they all knew that the darkness outside was the ordinary darkness of black night and not the strange darkness of that black day. But there was no break in the storm; and now and then, when a fierce burst of wind fairly set the house to rocking on its foundations, and sent the rain dashing in sheets against the windows, there would be anxious talk among those of the dancers who came from the Kerkehof or the Kesbeurt as to how they were to get home. From time to time one of the men would open the

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door a little and take a look outside—and would draw in again in a hurry and go straight to the punch-bowl for comforting: for none of them had seen any storm like that on Marken in all their lives.

And so, when at last the storm did lull a little—this was about eight o'clock in the evening, close upon the moonrise—there was a general disposition to take advantage of the break and get away. And Krelis did not urge his guests to stay longer, for he was of the same mind with them—being eager to carry off homeward his Geert with the flashing eyes.

But when the men went out of doors together to have a look about them they were brought up suddenly with a round turn. It is only a step from Jan de Jong's tavern to the head of the path that dips downward and leads across the marshes to the other villages. But when they had taken that step no path was to be seen! Close at their feet, and stretching away in front of them as far as their eyes could reach through the night-gloom, was to be seen only tumultuous black water flecked here and there with patches of foam. Everywhere over Marken, save the graveyard mound and the knolls on which stood the several villages, the

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ocean was in possession: right across the island were sweeping the storm-lashed waves of the Zuyder Zee!

XII

Though they all were filled with punch-begotten Dutch courage, not one of them but Krelis—as they stood together looking out over what should have been marsh-land and what was angry sea—thought even for a moment of getting homeward before daylight should come again and the gale should break away. And even Krelis would not have been for facing such danger at an ordinary time: but just then his soul and body were in commotion, and over the black stormy water he saw visions of Geert beckoning him to those red lips of hers, and firing him with the sparkle of her flashing eyes.

“It’s a bit of sea,” he said lightly, “but if one of you will lend a hand at an oar with me we’ll manage it easily. Just here it’s baddish. But a stiff pull of a hundred yards will fetch us into smoother water under the lee of the graveyard, and beyond that we’ll be a little under the lee of the Kerkehof—and then another spurt of stiff pulling will fetch us home. Geert will steer, and we can count on her to steer well. I

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wouldn't have risked it with Marretje at the tiller—but I've got another sort of a wife now. Which of you'll come along?"

There was a dead silence at that, for every one of the young fellows standing there knew that to take a boat out into that water meant a fight for life at every inch of the way.

"Well, since you're all so modest," Krelis went on with a laugh, "I'll pick out big Jan here to pull with me—and no offence to the rest of you, for we all know that not another man on Marken pulls so strong an oar."

It was old Jan himself who told me this, and he said that when Krelis chose him that way there was nothing for him to do but to say that he'd go. But he said that he went pale at the thought of what was before him, and would have given anything in the world to get out of the job. All the others spoke up against their trying it; and that, he said, while it scared him still more—for they all, in spite of the punch that was in them, spoke very seriously—helped him to go ahead. It would be something to talk about afterward, he thought, that he had done what everybody else was afraid to do. And when the others found that he and Krelis were not to be shaken, they set themselves

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to bringing a strong boat across from the other side of the village and getting it into the water—in a smooth place under the lee of one of the houses—and lashing a lantern fast into its bows.

When Krelis and Jan went back to the tavern to fetch Geert there was another outcry. All the women got around Geert and declared that she should not go. But Geert was ready always for any bit of daredeviltry, and the readier when anybody tried to hold her back from it—and then the way that Krelis looked at her would have taken her with him through the very gates of hell. She only laughed at the other women, and made them help her to put on the oil-skin hat and coat that Krelis fetched for her to keep her dry against the pelting rain. And she laughed still louder when she was rigged out in that queer dress—and what with her sparkling eyes and her splendid colour was so bewitching under the big hat that Krelis snatched a kiss from her and swore that at last he had a wife just to his mind.

All the company, muffled in shawls and cloaks, went along with them to the water-side to see them start; and because there was no commotion in the quiet nook where the boat

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was lying, and the darkness hid the tumbling waves beyond, most of them thought that the only danger ahead for Geert and the others was a thorough drenching—and were disposed to make fun of this queer wedding-journey on which they were bound. But the young men who had launched the boat knew better, and they tried once more to make Krelis give over his purpose—or, at least, to wait until the moon should rise a little and thin the clouds. And all the answer that they got was a laugh from Geert and a joking invitation from Krelis to come across to the Kesbeurt in the morning and join him in a glass of grog.

Krelis was to pull stroke, and so big Jan got into the boat ahead of him—with his heart fairly down in his boots, he told me—and then Krelis got in; and last of all Geert took her seat in the stern, and as she gripped the tiller steadily gave the order to shove off. With a strong push the young men gave the boat a start that sent it well out from the shore, and then the oars bit into the water and they were under way.

One of the old women whom I talked with was of the wedding - party, and down there by the shore that night, and she told me that they

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all cheered and laughed for a minute as the boat with the lantern in her bows shot off from the land. The thought of danger, she said, was quite out of their minds. Right in front of them, less than a quarter of a mile away, they saw the lights of the houses in the Kesbeurt shining brightly, and plainly setting the course for Geert to steer; and they knew that the two strongest men on Marken were at the oars. What they all were laughing about, she said, was that anybody should be going from the one village to the other in a boat—and that it should be a wedding-journey, too!

But it was only for a moment that their laughter lasted. The instant that the boat was out of the sheltered smooth water they all knew that not by one chance in a thousand could she live to fetch across. By the light of the lantern fixed in her bows they saw plainly the wild tumult of the sea around her—that caught her and seemed to stand her almost straight on end as Geert held her strongly against the on-coming waves. The old woman said that a thrill of horror ran through them all as they realized what certainly must happen. By a common impulse down they all went on their knees on the sodden ground, with the rain pelt-

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ing them—and she heard some one cry out in the darkness: “Old Jaap’s curse is upon them! May God pity and help them and have mercy on their souls!”

XIII

Old Jan, who alone knew it, told me the rest of the story—but speaking slowly and unwillingly, as though it all still were fresh before him and very horribly real.

He said that when the boat lifted as that first sea struck her it was plain enough what was likely to happen to them—for they could not put about to make the shore again without swamping, and with such a sea running they were pretty certain to swamp quickly if they went on. But Krelis was not the sort to give in, and he shouted over his shoulder: “I’ve got you into a scrape, Jan; but if we can pull up under the lee of the graveyard there’s a chance for us still.” And then he called to Geert: “Now you can show what stuff you’re made of, Geert. Steer for the graveyard—and for God’s sake hold her straight to the sea!” As for Geert, she was as cool as the best man could have been, and she steered as well as any man could have steered. The light from the lantern shone full

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in her face, and old Jan said that her eyes kept on sparkling and that her colour never changed.

With that tremendous wind sweeping down on them, and with the waves butting against the boat, and throwing her head up every instant, even Jan and Krelis—and they were the best oarsmen on Marken—could make only snail's way. But it heartened them to find that they made any way at all—as they could tell that they were doing by seeing the lights ashore crawling past them—and so they lashed away with their oars and found a little hope growing again. Presently Krelis called out: “The water's getting smoother, Jan. Another fifty yards and we'll be all right!”

That was true. They were creeping up steadily under the lee of the graveyard, and the closer they got to it the more would it break the force of the waves. If they could reach it they would be safe.

Just as Krelis spoke, the boat struck against something so sharply that she quivered all over and lost way. Neither of the men dared to turn even for an instant; nor could their turning have done any good—all that they could do was to row on. But Geert could look ahead, and the lantern in the bows cast a little circle

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of light upon the furious sea. As she peered over their shoulders a strange look came into her face, Jan said, and then she spoke in a voice strained and strange: "It's a coffin," she said, "and I see another one a little farther on. The sea is washing away the graveyard—as it did that time long ago!" And then the coffin went past them, so close that it struck against and nearly unshipped Krelis's oar.

Jan said that he trembled all over, and that a cold sweat broke out on him. He felt himself going sick and giddy, and fell to wondering what would happen should he be unable to keep on pulling—and how long it took a man to drown. Then—but because of a ringing in his ears the voice seemed to come faintly from very far away—he heard Krelis cry out cheerily: "Pull, Jan! If we're getting among the coffins we'll be safe in a dozen strokes more!"

It was at that instant that a great wave lifted the bow of the boat high out of the water, and as she fell away into the trough of the sea she struck again—but that time with a crash that had in it the sound of breaking boards. Jan knew that they must have struck the other coffin that Geert had seen, and he was sure that

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the boat was stove in and in another moment would fill and sink from under them.

For what seemed a whole age to him there was a grinding and a crunching beneath the keel; and then, as the boat swung free again, he saw Geert go chalk-pale suddenly—as she stood peering eagerly forward—and heard her give a great wild cry. And then her color rushed back into her cheeks and her eyes glittered as she called out in a strong voice resolutely: “It’s Marretje come to take you from me, Krelis—but she sha’n’t, she sha’n’t! You never really were her lover—and you always were and always shall be mine! And I hate her and I’ll get the better of her dead just as I hated her and got the better of her alive!” And with that Geert let go her hold upon the tiller and sprang forward and clasped Krelis in her arms.

Jan could not tell clearly what happened after that. All that he was sure of was the sight for an instant, tossing beside the boat in the circle of light cast by the lantern, of a lidless coffin in which lay wrapped in her white shroud the dead golden-haired Marretje—and then the boat broached to and went over, and there was nothing about him but blackness and

The Wrath of the Zuyder Zee

the tumultuous waves. As he went down into a hollow of the sea he felt the ground beneath his feet, and that put courage into him to make a fight for life. Struggling against the gale, and against waves which grew smaller as he battled on through them, he went forward with a heart-breaking slowness; and the strength was clean gone out of him when he won his way at last up the lee side of the little mound—and dropped down at full length there, in safe shelter amidst the graves.

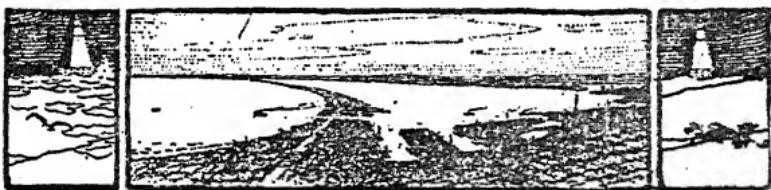
“And Geert and Krelis?” I asked.

“With her arms tight about him there was no chance for either of them,” he answered. And then he went on, speaking very solemnly: “The word that was truth had been spoken against them. They perished in the wrath of the Zuyder Zee!”

A Duluth Tragedy

A Duluth Tragedy

I



JUTTING out from the rocky coast, a sand spit nearly seven miles long, Minnesota Point is as a strong arm stretched forth to defend the harbour of Duluth against the storms which breed in the frozen North and come roaring down Lake Superior. Wisconsin Point, less than half its length, almost meets it from the other shore. Between the two is the narrow inlet through which in old times came the Canadian voyageurs—on their way across Saint Louis Bay and up the windings of the Saint Louis River to Fond du Lac, twenty miles

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farther westward. That was in the fur-trading days of little sailing-vessels and birch-bark canoes. Now, close to its shoulder, the Point is cut by a canal through which the great black steamships come and go.

Five-and-twenty years ago—before the canal was thought of, and when the Duluth of the present, with its backing of twenty thousand miles of railway, was a dream just beginning to be realized—Minnesota Point was believed to have a great future. Close to its shoulder a town site was staked out, and little wooden houses were built at a great rate. Corner lots on that sand spit were at a premium. The “boom” was on. The smash of ’73 knocked the bottom out of everything for a while. When good times came again the town site moved on westward a half-mile or so and settled itself on the mainland. The little houses on the Point were out of the running and were taken up by Swedes—who were content, as Americans were not, to live a few steps away from the strenuous centre of that inchoate metropolis. That time the “boom” was a genuine one. The new city had come to stay. In course of time, to meet its growing trade requirements, the canal was cut which made the Point an island—and

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after that the Point was dead for good and all.

Nowadays it is only in summer that a little life, other than that of its few inhabitants, shows itself on Minnesota Point—when camping-parties and picnic-parties go down by three miles of shaky tramway to Oatka Beach. During all the rest of the year that sandy barren, with its forlorn decaying houses and its dreary growth of pines stunted by the harsh lake winds, is forgotten and desolate. Now and then is heard the cry of a gull flying across it slowly; and always against its outer side—with a thunderous crash in times of storm, in times of calm with a sad soft lap-lapping—surge or ripple the deathly cold waters of Lake Superior: waters so cold that whoever drowns in them sinks quickly—not to rise again (as the drowned do usually), but for all time, in chill companionship with the countless dead gathered there through the ages, to be lost and hidden in those icy depths.

The ghastly coldness of the water in which it is merged seems to have numbed the Point and reconciled it to its bleak destiny. It has accepted its fate: recognizing with a grim indifference that its once glowing future has van-

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ished irrevocably into what now is the hopelessness of its nearly forgotten past.

II



George Maltham, wandering out on the Point one Sunday morning in the early spring-time—he had just come up from Chicago to take charge of the Duluth end of his father's line of lake steamers and was lonely in that strange place, and was the more disposed to be misanthropic because he had a headache left over from the previous wet night at the club—came promptly to the conclusion that he never had struck a place so god-forsakenly dismal. Aside from his own feelings, there was even more than usual to justify this opinion. The day was grey and chill. A strong northeast wind was blowing that covered the lake with white-

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caps and that sent a heavy surf rolling shoreward. A little ice, left from the spring break-up, still was floating in the harbour. Under these conditions the Point was at its cheerless worst.

Maltham had crossed the canal by the row-boat ferry. Having mounted the sodden steps and looked about him for a moment—in which time his conclusion was reached as to the Point's god-forsaken dismalness—he was for abandoning his intended explorations and going straight-away back to the mainland. But when he turned to descend the steps the boat had received some waiting passengers—three church-bound Swedish women in their Sunday clothes—and had just pushed off. That little turn of chance decided him. After all, he said to himself, it did not make much difference. What he wanted was a walk to rid him of his headache; and the Point offered him, as the rocky hill-sides of the mainland conspicuously did not, a good long stretch of level land.

Before him extended an absurdly wide street—laid out in magnificent expectation of the traffic that never came to it—flanked in far-reaching perspective by the little houses which sprang up in such a hurry when the “boom”

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was on. In its centre was the tramway, its road-bed laid with wooden planks. The dingy open tram-car, in which the church-bound Swedish women had come up to the ferry, started away creakingly while he stood watching it. That was the only sight or sound of life. For some little time, in the stillness, he could hear the driver addressing Swedish remarks of an encouraging or abusive nature to his mule.

Taking the planked tramway in preference to the rotten wooden sidewalks full of pitfalls, Maltham walked on briskly for a mile or so—his headache leaving him in the keen air—until the last of the little houses was passed. There the vast street suddenly dribbled off into a straggling sandy road, which wound through thickets of bushy white birch and a sparse growth of stunted pines. The tramway, along which he continued, went on through the brush in a straight line. The Point had narrowed to a couple of hundred yards. Through rifts in the tangle about him he could see heaps of storm-piled drift-wood scattered along the lake-side beach—on which the surf was pounding heavily. On the harbour side the beach was broken by inthrusts of sedgy swamp. Presently he came to a sandy open space in which, beside

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a weather-worn little wooden church, was a neglected graveyard that seemed to give the last touch of dreariness to that dismal solitude.

The graveyard was a waste of sand, save where bushy patches of birch had sprung up in it from wind-borne seeds. Swept by many storms, the sandy mounds were disappearing. Still marking the graves were a few shabby wooden crosses and a dozen or so of slanting or fallen wooden slabs. Once these short-lived monuments had been painted white and had borne legends in black lettering. But only a Swedish word or a Swedish name remained here and there legible—for the sun and the wind and the rain had been doing their erasing work steadily for years. One slab alone stood nearly upright and retained a few partly decipherable lines in English. But even on that Maltham could make out only the scattered words: “Sacred . . . Ulrica . . . Royal House of Sweden . . . ever beloved . . . of Major Calhoun Ashley,” and a date that seemed to be 1879.

His headache had gone, but it had left him heavy and dejected. That fragmentary epitaph increased his sombreness. Even had he been in a cheerful mood he could not have failed to perceive the pathetic irony of it all. There

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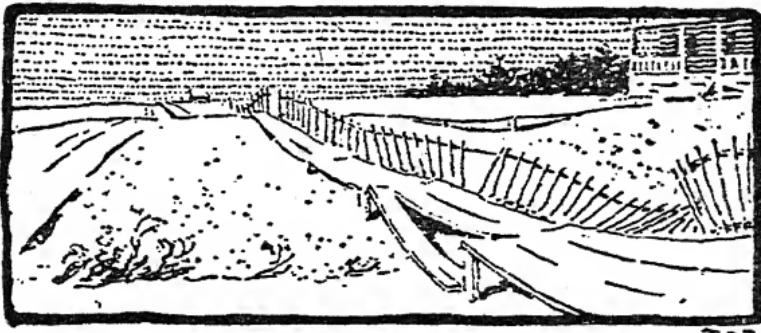
was more than the ordinary cruelty of death and forgetfulness, he thought, about that grave so desolate of one who had been connected—it did not matter how—with a “royal house,” and who was described in those almost illegible lines as “ever beloved.” That was human nature down to the hard pan, he thought; and with a half-smile and a half-sigh over the fate of that poor dead Ulrica he turned away from the graveyard and walked on. Half-whimsically he wondered if he had reached the climax of the melancholy which brooded over that dreary sand spit. As he stated the case to himself, short of finding a man lying murdered among the birch-bushes it was not likely that he would strike anything able to raise that graveyard’s hand!

The murdered man did not materialize, and the next out-of-the-way sight that he came across—when he had walked on past the dingy and forgotten-looking little church—was a big ramshackling wooden house of such pretentious absurdity that his first glimpse of it fairly made him laugh. Its square centre was a wooden tower of three stories, battlemented, flanked by two battlemented wings. A veranda ran along the lower floor, and above the veranda

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was a gallery. Some of the windows were boarded over; others had scraps of carpet stuck into their glassless gaps—and all had Venetian shutters (singularly at odds with the climate of that region) hanging dubiously and with many broken slats. The paint had weathered away, and bricks had fallen from the chimney-tops—a loss which gave to the queer structure, in conjunction with lapses in its wooden battlements, a sadly broken-crested air. As a whole, it suggested a badly done caricature of an old-fashioned Southern homestead—of which the essence of the caricature was finding it in that bleak Northern land.

III



Maltham had come to a full stop in front of this absurd dwelling, which was set a little back from the road in a dishevelled enclosure,

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and as he stood examining in an amused way its various eccentricities he became aware that from one of the lower windows a man was watching him.

This was disconcerting, and he turned to walk on. But before he had gone a dozen steps the front door opened and the man came outside. He was dressed in shabby grey clothes with a certain suggestion of a military cut about them; but in spite of his shabbiness he had the look of a gentleman. He was sixty, or thereabouts, and seemed to have been well set up when he was younger—before the slouch had settled on his shoulders and before he had taken on a good many unnecessary inches about his waist. From where he stood on the veranda he hailed Maltham cordially:

“Won’t yo’ come in, suh? I have obsehved youah smiles at my old house heah— No, no, yo’ owe me no apology, suh,” he went on quickly, as Maltham attempted a confused disclaimer. “Yo’ ah quite justified in laughing, suh, at my foolish fancy—that went wrong mainly because the Yankee ca’pentah whom I employed to realize it was a hopelessly damned fool. But it was a creditable sentiment, suh which led me to desiah to reproduce heah in god

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fo'saken Minnesotah my ancestral home in the grand old State of South Cahrolina—the house that my grandfatheh built theah and named Eutaw Castle, as I have named its pore suc-cesseh, because of the honorable paht he bo' in the battle of Eutaw Springs. The result, I admit, is a thing to laugh at, suh—but not the ideah. No, suh, not the ideah! But come in, suh, come in! The exterioh of Eutaw Castle may be a failuah; but within it, suh, yo' will find in this cold No'th'en region the genuine wahm hospitality of a true Southe'n home!"

Maltham perceived that the only apology which he could offer for laughing at this absurd house—the absurdity of which became rather pathetic, he thought, in view of its genesis—was to accept its owner's invitation to enter it. Acting on this conclusion, he turned into the enclosure—the gate, hanging loosely on a single hinge, was standing open—and mounted the veranda steps.

As he reached the top step his host advanced and shook hands with him warmly. "Yo'ah veahy welcome, suh," he said; and added, after putting his hand to a pocket in search of something that evidently was not there: "Ah, I find that I have not my cahd-case about me. Yo'

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must pehmit me to introduce myself: Majoh Calhoun Ashley, of the Confedehrate sehvice, suh—and veyh much at youahs.”

Maltham started a little as he heard this name, and the small shock so far threw him off his balance that as he handed his card to the Major he said: “Then it was your name that I saw just now in—” And stopped short, inwardly cursing himself for his awkwardness.

“That yo’ saw in the little graveyahd, on the tomb of my eveh-beloved wife, suh,” the Major replied—with a quaver in his voice which compelled Maltham mentally to reverse his recent generalizations. The Major was silent for a moment, and then continued: “Heh grave is not yet mahked fitly, suh, as no doubt yo’ ob sehved. Cihecumstances oveh which I have had no control have prevented me from erecting as yet a suitable monument oveh heh sacred re mains. She was my queen, suh”—his voice broke again—“and of a line of queens: a descendant, suh, from a collateral branch of the ancient royal house of Sweden. I am hoping, I am hoping, suh, that I shall be able soon to erect oveh heh last resting-place a monument wo’thy of heh noble lineage and of hehsself. I am hoping, suh, to do that veyh soon.”

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The Major again was silent for a moment; and then, pulling himself together, he looked at Maltham's card—holding it a long way off from his eyes. "Youah name is familiar to me, suh," he said, "though fo' the moment I do not place it, and I am most happy to make youah acquaintance. But come in, suh, come in. I am fo'getting myself—keeping you standing this way outside of my own doah."

He took Maltham cordially by the arm and led him through the doorway into a wide bare hall; and thence into a big room on the right, that was very scantily furnished but that was made cheerful by a rousing drift-wood fire. Over the high mantel-piece was hung an officer's sword with its belt. On the buckle of the belt were the letters C. S. A. Excepting this rather pregnant bit of decoration, the whitewashed walls were bare.

The Major bustled with hospitality—pulling the bigger and more comfortable of two arm-chairs to the fire and seating Maltham in it, and then bringing out glasses and a bottle from a queer structure of unpainted white pine that stood at one end of the room and had the look of a sideboard gone wrong.

"At the moment, suh," he said apologetically,

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"my cellah is badly fuhnished and I am unable to offeh yo' wine. But if yo' have an appreciative taste fo' Bourbon," he went on with more assurance, "I am satisfied that yo' will find the ahticle in this bottle as sound as any that the noble State of Kentucky eveh has produced. Will yo' oblige me, suh, by saying when!"

Not knowing about the previous wet night, and its still lingering consequences, the promptness with which Maltham said "when" seemed to disconcert the Major a little—but not sufficiently to deter him from filling his own glass with a handsome liberality. Holding it at a level with his lips, he turned toward his guest with the obvious intention of drinking a toast.

"May I have a little water, please?" put in Maltham.

"I beg youah pahdon, suh. I humbly beg youah pahdon," the Major answered. "I am not accustomed to dilute my own liquoh, and I most thoughtlessly assumed that yo' would not desiah to dilute youahs. I trust that yo' will excuse my seeming rudeness, suh. Yo' shall have at once the bevehrage which yo' desiah."

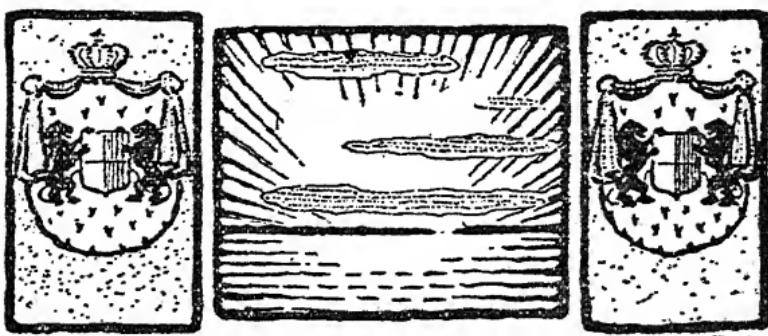
While still apologizing, the Major placed

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his glass on the table and went to the door. Opening it he called: "Ulrica, my child, bring a pitcheh of fresh wateh right away."

Again Maltham gave a little start—as he had done when the Major had introduced himself. In a vague sub-conscious way he felt that there was something uncanny in thus finding living owners of names which he had seen, within that very hour, scarcely legible above an uncared-for grave. But the Major, talking on volubly, did not give him much opportunity for these psychological reflections; and presently there was the sound of footsteps in the hall outside, and then the door opened and the owner of the grave-name appeared.

IV



Because of the odd channel in which his thoughts were running, Maltham had the still

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odder fancy for an instant that the young girl who entered the room was the dead Ulrica of whom the Major had spoken—"a queen, and of a line of queens." And even when this thought had passed—so quickly that it was gone before he had risen to his feet to greet her—the impression of her queenliness remained. For this living woman bearing a dead name might have been Aslauga herself: so tall and stately was she, and so fair with that cold beauty of the North of which the soul is fire. Instinctively he felt the fire, and knew that it still slumbered—and knew, too, that in the fulness of time, being awakened, it would glow with a consuming splendour in her dark eyes.

All this went in a flash through his mind before the Major said: "Pehmit me, Mr. Maltham, to present yo' to my daughteh, Miss Ulrica Ashley." And added: "Mr. Maltham was passing, Ulrica, and did me the honeh to accept my invitation to come in."

She put down the pitcher of water and gave Maltham her hand. "It was very kind of you, sir," she said gravely. "We do not have many visitors, and my father gets lonely with only me. It was very kind of you, sir, indeed."

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She spoke with a certain precision, and with a very slight accent—so slight that Maltham did not immediately notice it. What he did notice, with her first words, was the curiously thrilling quality of her low-pitched and very rich voice.

“And don’t you get lonely too?” he asked.

“Why no,” she answered with a little air of surprise. And speaking slowly, as though she were working the matter out in her mind, she added: “With me it is different, you see. I was born here on the Point and I love it. And then I have the house to look after. And I have my boat. And I can talk with the neighbours—though I do not often care to. Father cannot talk with them, because he does not know Swedish as I do. When he wants company he has to go all the way up to town. You see, it is not the same with us at all.” And then, as though she had explained the matter sufficiently, she turned to the Major and asked: “Do you want anything more, father?”

“Nothing mo’, my child—except that an extra place is to be set at table. Mr. Maltham will dine with us, of co’se.”

At this Maltham protested a little; but pres-

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ently yielded to Ulrica's, "You will be doing a real kindness to father if you will stay, Mr. Maltham," backed by the Major's peremptory: "Yo' ah my prisoneh, suh, and in Eutaw Castle we don't permit ouah prisonehs to stahve!" The matter being thus settled, Ulrica made a little formal bow and left the room.

"The wateh is at youah sehvice, suh," said the Major as the door closed behind her. "I beg that yo' will dilute youah liquoh to youah liking. Heah's to youah very good health, suh—and to ouah betteh acquaintance." He drank his whiskey appreciatively, and as he set down his empty glass continued: "May I ask, suh, if yo' ah living in Duluth, oh mehly passing through? I ventuah to ask because a resident of this town sca'cely would be likely to come down on the Point at this time of yeah."

"I began to be a resident only day before yesterday," Maltham answered. "I've come to take charge here of our steamers—the Sunrise Line."

"The Sunrise Line!" repeated the Major in a very eager tone. "The biggest transpo'tation line on the lakes. The line of which that great capitalist Mr. John L. Maltham is president.

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And to think, suh, that I did not recognize youah name!"

"John L. Maltham is my father," the young man said.

"Why, of co'se, of co'se! I might have had the sense to know that as soon as I looked at youah cahd. This is a most fo'tunate meeting, Mr. Maltham—most fo'tunate for both of us. I shall not on this occasion, when yo' ah my guest, enteh into a discussion of business mattehs. But at an eahly day I shall have the honeh to lay befo' yo' convincing reasons why youah tehminal docks should be established heah on the Point—which a beneficent Providence cleahly intended to be the shipping centeh of this metropolis—and prefehrably, suh, as the meahest glance at a chaht of the bay will demonstrate, heah on my land. Yo' will have the first choice of the wha'ves which I have projected; and I may even say, suh, that any altehrations which will affo'd mo' convenient accommodations to youah vessels still ah possible. Yes, suh, the matteh has not gone so fah but that any reasonable changes which yo' may desiah may yet be made."

Remembering the sedgy swamps beside which he had passed that morning, Maltham was

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satisfied that the Major's concluding statement was well within the bounds of truth. But he was not prepared to meet off-hand so radical a proposition, and while he was fumbling in his mind for some sort of non-committal answer the Major went on again.

"It is not fo' myself, suh," he said, "that I desiah to realize this magnificent undehtaking. Living heah costs little, and what I get from renting my land to camping pahties and fo' picnics gives me all I need. And I'm an old man, anyway, and whetheh I die rich oh pore don't matteh. It's fo' my daughteh's sake that I seek wealth, suh, not fo' my own. That deah child of mine is heh sainted motheh oveh again, Mr. Maltham—except that heh motheh's eyes weh blue. That is the only diffehrence. And beside heh looks she has identically the same sweet natuah, suh — the same exquisite goodness and beauty of haht. When my great loss came to me," the Major's voice broke badly, "it was my love fo' that deah child kept me alive. It breaks my haht, suh, to think of dying and leaving heh heah alone and pore."

Maltham had got to his bearings by this time and was able to frame a reasonably diplo-

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matic reply. "Well, perhaps we'd better not go into the matter to-day," he said. "You see, our line has traffic agreements with the N. P. and the Northwestern that must hold for the present, anyway. And then I've only just taken charge, you know, and I must look around a little before I do anything at all. But I might write to my father to come up here when he can, and then he and you could have a talk."

The Major's look of eager cheerfulness faded at the beginning of this cooling rejoinder, but he brightened again at its end. "A talk with youah fatheh, suh," he answered, "would suit me down to the ground-flo'. An oppo'tunity to discuss this great matteh info'mally with a great capitalist has been what I've most desiahed fo' yeahs. But I beg youah pahdon, suh. I am fo'getting the sacred duties of hospitality. Pehmit me to fill youah glass."

It seemed to pain him that his guest refused this invitation; but, finding him obdurate, he kept the sacred duties of hospitality in working order by exercising them freely upon himself. "Heah's to the glorious futuah of Minnesotah Point, suh!" he said as he raised his glass—and it was obvious that he would be off again

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upon the exploitation of his hopelessly impossible project as soon as he put it down. Greatly to Maltham's relief, the door opened at that juncture and Ulrica entered to call them to dinner; and he was still more relieved, when they were seated at table, by finding that his host dropped business matters and left the glorious future of Minnesota Point hanging in the air.

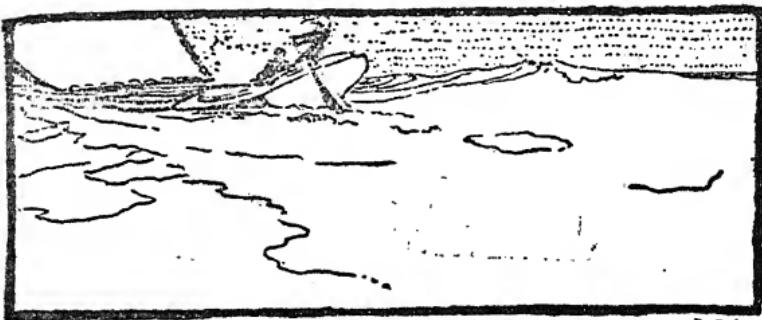
At his own table, indeed, the Major was quite at his best. He told good stories of his army life, and of his adventurous wanderings which ended when he struck Duluth just at the beginning of its first "boom"; and very entertaining was what he had to tell of that metropolis in its embryotic days.

But good though the Major's stories were, Maltham found still more interesting the Major's daughter—who spoke but little, and who seemed to be quite lost at times in her own thoughts. As he sat slightly turned toward her father he could feel her eyes fixed upon him; and more than once, facing about suddenly, he met her look full. When this happened she was not disconcerted, nor did she immediately look away from him—and he found himself thrilled curiously by her deeply intent gaze.

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Yet the very frankness of it gave it a quality that was not precisely flattering. He had the feeling that she was studying him in much the same spirit that she would have studied some strange creature that she might have come across in her walks in the woods. When he tried to bring her into the talk he did not succeed; but this was mainly because the Major invariably cut in before he could get beyond a direct question and a direct reply. Only once—when her father made some reference to her love for sailing—was her reserve, which was not shyness, a little broken; and the few words that she spoke before the Major broke in again were spoken so very eagerly that Maltham resolved to bring her back to that subject when he could get the chance. Knowing something of the ways of women, he knew that to set her to talking about anything in which she was profoundly interested would lower her guard at all points—and so would enable him to come in touch with her thoughts. He wanted to get at her thoughts. He was sure that they were not of a commonplace kind.

V



When the dinner was ended he made a stroke for the chance that he wanted. "Will you show me your boat?" he asked. "I'm a bit of a sailor myself, and I should like to see her very much indeed."

"Oh, would you? I am so glad!" she answered eagerly. And then added more quietly: "It is a real pleasure to show you the *Nixie*. I am very fond of her and very proud of her. Father gave her to me three years ago—after he sold a lot over in West Superior. And it was very good of him, because he does not like sailing at all. Will you come now? It is only a step down to the wharf."

The Major declared that he must have his after-dinner pipe in comfort, and they went off without him—going out by a side door and

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across a half-acre of kitchen-garden, still in winter disorder, to the wharf on the bay-side where the *Nixie* was moored. She was a half-decked twenty-foot cat-boat, clean in her lines and with the look of being able to hold her own pretty well in a blow.

"Is she not beautiful?" Ulrica asked with great pride. And presently, when Maltham came to a pause in his praises, she added hesitatingly: "Would you—would you care to come out in her for a little while?"

"Indeed I would!" he answered instantly and earnestly.

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" Ulrica exclaimed. "I do want you to see how wonderfully she sails!"

The boat was moored with her stern close to the wharf and with her bow made fast to an outstanding stake. When they had boarded her Ulrica cast off the stern mooring, ran the boat out to the stake and made fast with a short hitch, and then—as the boat swung around slowly in the slack air under the land—set about hoisting the sail. She would not permit Maltham to help her. He sat aft, steadying the tiller, watching with delight her vigorous dexterity and her display of absolute strength.

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When she had sheeted home and made fast she cast off the bow mooring, and then stepped aft quickly and took the tiller from his hand. For a few moments they drifted slowly. Then the breeze, coming over the tree-tops, caught them and she leaned forward and dropped the centre-board and brought the boat on the wind. It was a leading wind, directly off the lake, that enabled them to make a single leg of it across the bay. As the boat heeled over Maltham shifted his seat to the weather side. This brought him a little in front of Ulrica, and below her as she stood to steer. From under the bows came a soft hissing and bubbling as the boat slid rapidly along.

“Is she not wonderful?” Ulrica asked with a glowing enthusiasm. “Just see how we are dropping that big sloop over yonder—and the *Nixie* not half her size! But the *Nixie* is well bred, you see, and the sloop is not. She is as heavy all over as the *Nixie* is clean and fine. Father says that breeding is everything—in boats and in horses and in men. He says that a gentleman is the finest thing that God ever created. It was because the Southerners all were gentlemen that they whipped the Yankees, you know.”

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"But they didn't—the Yankees whipped them."

"Only in the last few battles, father says—and those did not count, so far as the principle is concerned," Ulrica answered conclusively.

Maltham did not see his way to replying to this presentation of the matter and was silent. Presently she went on, with a slight air of apology: "I hope you did not mind my looking at you so much while we were at dinner, Mr. Maltham. You see, except father, you are the only gentleman I ever have had a chance to look at close, that way, in my whole life. Father will not have much to do with the people living up in town. Most of them are Yankees, and he does not like them. None of them ever come to see us. The only people I ever talk with are our neighbours; and they are just common people, you know—though some of them are as good as they can be. And as father always is talking about what a gentleman ought to be or ought not to be it is very interesting really to meet one. That was the reason why I stared at you so. I hope you did not mind."

"I'm glad I interested you, even if it was only as a specimen of a class," Maltham answer-

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ed. "I hope that you found me a good specimen." Her simplicity was so refreshing that he sought by a leading question to induce a farther exhibition of it. "What is your ideal of a gentleman?" he asked.

"Oh, just the ordinary one," she replied in a matter-of-fact tone. "A gentleman must be absolutely brave, and must kill any man who insults him—or, at least, must hurt him badly. He must be absolutely honest—though he is not bound, of course, to tell all that he knows when he is selling a horse. He must be absolutely true to the woman he loves, and must never deceive her in any way. He must not refuse to drink with another gentleman unless he is willing to fight him. He must protect women and children. He must always be courteous—though he may be excused for a little rudeness when he has been drinking and so is not quite himself. He must be hospitable—ready to share his last crust with anybody, and his last drink with anybody of his class. And he must know how to ride and shoot and play the principal games of cards. Those are the main things. You are all that, are you not?"

She looked straight at him as she asked this question, speaking still in the same entirely

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matter-of-fact tone. But Maltham did not look straight back at her as he answered it. The creed that she set forth had queer articles in it, but its essentials were searching—so searching that his look was directed rather indefinitely toward the horizon as he replied, a little weakly perhaps: "Why, of course."

She seemed to be content with this not wholly conclusive answer; but as he was not content with it himself, and rather dreaded a cross-examination, he somewhat suddenly shifted the talk to a subject that he was sure would engross her thoughts. "How splendidly the *Nixie* goes!" he said. "She is a racer, and no mistake!"

"Indeed she is!" Ulrica exclaimed, with the fervour upon which he had counted. "She is the very fastest boat on the bay. And then she is so weatherly! Why, I can sail her into the very eye of the wind!"

"Yes, she has the look of being weatherly. But she wouldn't be if you didn't manage her so well. Who taught you how to sail?"

"It was old Gustav Bergmann—one of the fishermen here on the Point, you know. And he said," she went on with a little touch of pride, "that he never could have made such a

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good sailor of me if I had not had it in my blood—because I am a Swede."

"But you are an American."

Ulrica did not answer him immediately, and when she did speak it was with the same curiously slow thoughtfulness that he had observed when she was explaining the difference between her father's life and her own life in the solitude of Minnesota Point.

"I do not think I am," she said. "I do not know many American women, but I am not like any American woman I know. You see, I am very like my mother. Father says so, and I feel it—I cannot tell you just how I feel it, but I do. For one thing, I am more than half a savage, father says—like some of the wild Indians he has known. He is in fun, of course, when he says that; but he really is right, I am sure. Did you ever want to kill anybody, Mr. Maltham?"

"No," said Maltham with a laugh, "I never did. Did you?"

Ulrica remained grave. "Yes," she answered, "and I almost did it, too. You see, it was this way: A man, one of the campers down on the Point, was rude to me. He was drunk, I think. But I did not think about

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his being drunk, and that I ought to make allowances for him. Somehow, I had not time to think. Everything got red suddenly—and before I knew what I was doing I had out my knife. The man gave a scream—not a cry, but a real scream: he must have been a great coward, I suppose—and jumped away just as I struck at him. I cut his arm a little, I think. But I am not sure, for he ran away as hard as he could run. I was very sorry that I had not killed him. I am very sorry still whenever I think about it. Now that was not like an American woman. At least, I do not know any American woman who would try to kill a man that way because she really could not help trying to. Do you?"

"No," Maltham answered, drawing a quick breath that came close to being a gasp. Ulrica's entire placidity, and her argumentative manner, had made her story rather coldly thrilling—and it was quite thrilling enough without those adjuncts, he thought.

She seemed pleased that his answer confirmed her own opinion. "Yes, I think I am right about myself," she went on. "I am sure that it is my Swedish blood that makes me like that. We do not often get angry, you know,

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we Swedes: but when we do, our anger is rage. We do not think nor reason. Suddenly we see red, as I did that day, and we want to strike to kill. It is queer, is it not, that we should be made like that?"

Maltham certainly was discovering the strange thoughts that he had set himself to search for. They rather set his nerves on edge. As she uttered her calm reflection upon the oddity of the Swedish temperament he shivered a little.

"I am afraid that you are cold," she said anxiously. "Shall we go about? Father will not like it if I make you uncomfortable."

"I am not at all cold," he answered. "And the sailing is delightful. Don't let us go about yet."

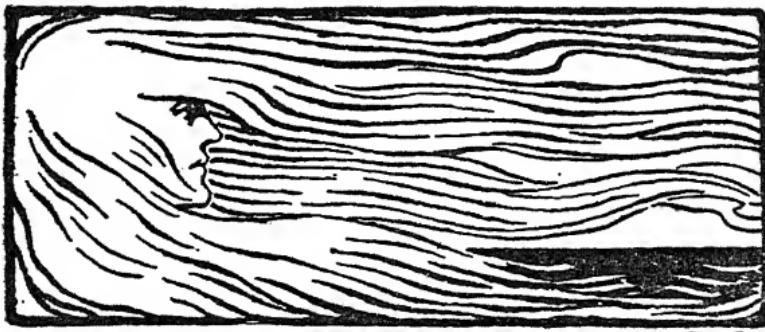
"Well, if you are quite sure that you are not cold, we will not. I do want to take you down to the inlet and show you what a glorious sea is running on the lake to-day. It is only half a mile more."

They sailed on for a little while in silence. The swift send of the boat through the water seemed so to fill Ulrica with delight that she did not care to speak—nor did Maltham, who was busied with his own confused thoughts.

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Suddenly some new and startling concepts of manhood and of womanhood had been thrust into his mind. They puzzled him, and he was not at all sure that he liked them. But he was absolutely sure that this curious and very beautiful woman who had uttered them interested him more profoundly than any woman whom ever he had known. That fact also bothered him, and he tried to blink it. That he could not blink it was one reason why his thoughts were confused. Presently, being accustomed to slide along the lines of least resistance, he gave up trying. "After all," was his conclusion, so far as he came to a conclusion, "it is only for a day."

VI



As they neared the inlet the water roughened a little and the wind grew stronger. Ulrica eased off the sheet, and steadied it with a turn

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around the pin. In a few minutes more they had opened the inlet fairly, and beyond it could see the lake—stretching away indefinitely until its cold grey surface was lost against the cold grey sky. A very heavy sea was running. In every direction was the gleam of white-caps. On the beaches to the left and right of them a high surf was booming in. They ran on, close-hauled, until they were nearly through the inlet and were come into a bubble of water that set the boat to dancing like a cork. Now and then, as she fell off, a wave would take her with a thump and cover them with a cloud of spray.

The helm was pulling hard, but Ulrica managed it as easily and as knowingly as she had managed the setting of the sail—standing with her feet well apart, firmly braced, her tall figure yielding to the boat's motion with a superb grace. Suddenly a gust of wind carried away her hat, and in another moment the great mass of her golden hair was blowing out behind her in the strong eddy from the sail. Her face was radiant. Every drop of her Norse blood was tingling in her veins. Aslauga herself never was more gloriously beautiful—and never more joyously drove her boat onward through a stormy sea.

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But Maltham did not perceive her beauty, nor did he in the least share her glowing enthusiasm. He had passed beyond mere nervousness and was beginning to be frightened. It seemed to him that she let the boat fall off purposely—as though to give the waves a chance to buffet it, and then to show her command over them by bringing it up again sharply into the wind; and he was certain that if they carried on for another five minutes, and so got outside the inlet, they would be swamped.

“Don’t you think that we had better go about?” he asked. It did not please him to find that he had not complete control over his voice.

“But it is so glorious,” she answered.
“Shall we not keep on just a little way?”

“No!” he said sharply. “We must go about at once. We are in great danger as it is.” He felt that he had turned pale. In spite of his strong effort to steady it, his voice shook badly and also was a little shrill.

“Oh, of course,” she replied, with a queer glance at him that he did not at all fancy; “if you feel that way about it we will.” The radiance died away from her face as she spoke, and with it went her intoxication of delight. And

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then her expression grew anxious as she looked about her, and in an anxious tone she added: "Indeed you are quite right, Mr. Maltham. We really are in a bad place here. I ought never to have come out so far. We must try to get back at once. But it will not be easy. I am not sure that the *Nixie* will stand it. I am sure, though, that she will do her best—and I will try to wear her as soon as I see a chance."

She luffed a little, that she might get more sea-room to leeward, and scanned the oncoming waves closely but without a sign of fear. "Now I think I can do it," she said presently, and put up the helm.

It was a ticklish move, for they were at the very mouth of the inlet, but the *Nixie* paid off steadily until she came full into the trough of the sea. There she wallowed for a bad ten seconds. A wave broke over the coaming of the cockpit and set it all aflow. Maltham went still whiter, and began to take off his coat. It was with the greatest difficulty that he kept back a scream. Then the boat swung around to her course—Ulrica's hold upon the tiller was a very steady one—and in another minute they were sliding back safely before the wind. In five

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minutes more they were in the smooth water of the bay.

Ulrica was the first to speak, and she spoke in most contrite tones. "It was very, very wrong in me to do that, Mr. Maltham," she said. "And it was wicked of me, too—for I have given my solemn promise to father that I never will go out on the lake when it is rough at all. Please, please forgive me for taking you into such danger in such a foolish way. It was touch and go, you know, that we pulled through. Please say that you forgive me. It will make me a little less wretched if you do."

The danger was all over, and Maltham had got back both his color and his courage again. "Why, it was nothing!" he said. "Or, rather, it was a good deal—for it gave me a chance to see what a magnificent sailor you are. And—and it was splendidly exciting out there, wasn't it?"

"Wasn't it!" she echoed rapturously. "And oh," she went on, "I am so glad that you take it that way! It is a real load off my mind! Will you please take the tiller for a minute while I put up my hair?"

As she arranged the shining masses of her golden hair—her full round arms uplifted, the

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wind pressing her draperies close about her—Maltham watched her with a burning intentness. The glowing reaction following escape from mortal peril was upon him and the tide of his barely saved life was running full. In Ulrica's stronger nature the same tide may have been running still more impetuously. For an instant their eyes met. She flushed and looked away.

He did not speak, and the silence seemed to grow irksome to her. She broke it, but with a perceptible effort, as she took the tiller again. "Do you know," she said, "I did think for a minute that you were scared." She laughed a little, and then went on more easily: "And if you really had been scared I should have known, of course, that you were not a gentleman! Was it not absurd?"

Her words roused him, and at the same time chilled him. "Yes, it was very absurd," he answered not quite easily. And then, with presence of mind added: "But I *was* scared, and badly scared—for you. I did not see how I possibly could get you ashore if the boat filled."

"You could not have done it—we should have been drowned," Ulrica replied with quiet

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conviction. "But because you are a gentleman it was natural, I suppose, for you not to think about yourself and to worry that way about me. You could not help it, of course—but I like it, all the same."

Maltham reddened slightly. Instead of answering her he asked: "Would you mind running up along the Point and landing me on the other side of the canal? I want to hurry home and get into dry things—and that will save me a lot of time, you know."

"Oh," she cried in a tone of deep concern, "are you not coming back with me? I shall have a dreadful time with father, and I am counting on you to help me through."

Maltham had foreseen that trouble with the Major was impending, and wanted to keep out of it. He disliked scenes. "Of course, if you want me to, I'll go back with you," he answered. And added, drawing himself together and shivering a little, "I don't believe that I shall catch much cold."

"What a selfish creature I am!" Ulrica exclaimed impetuously. "Of course you must hurry home as fast as you can. What I shall get from father will not be the half of what I deserve. And to think of my thinking about

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your getting me off from a scolding at the cost of your being ill! Please do not hate me for it—though you ought to, I am sure!"

Having carried his point, Maltham could afford to be amiable again. He looked straight into her eyes, and for an instant touched her hand, as he said: "No, I shall not—hate you!" His voice was low. He drawled slightly. The break gave to his phrase a telling emphasis.

It was not quite fair. He knew thoroughly the game that he was playing; while Ulrica, save so far as her instinct might guide her, did not know it at all. She did not answer him—and he was silent because silence just then was the right move. And so they went on without words until they were come to the landing-place beside the canal. Even then—for he did not wish to weaken a strong impression—he made the parting a short one: urging that she also must hurry home and get on dry clothes. It did not strike her, either then or later, that he would have shown a more practical solicitude in the premises had he not made her come three miles out of her way.

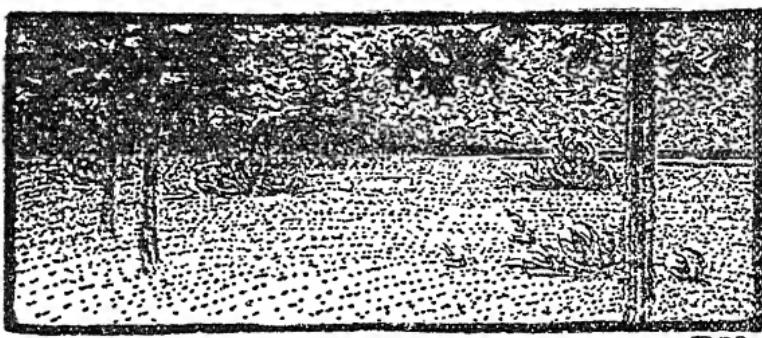
Indeed, as she sailed those three miles back again, her mind was in no condition to work

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clearly. In a confused way, that yet was very delightful, she went over to herself the events of that wonderful day—in which, as she vaguely realized, her girlhood had ended and her womanhood had begun. But she dwelt most upon the look that he had given her when he told her, with the break in his phrase, that he would not hate her; and upon the touch of his hand at parting, and his final speech, also with a break in it: “I shall see you to-morrow—if you care to have me come.”

At the club that evening Maltham wrote a very entertaining letter to Miss Eleanor Strangford, in Chicago: telling her about the queer old Major and his half-wild daughter, and how the daughter had taken him out sailing and had brought him back drenched through. He was a believer in frankness, and this letter—while not exhaustive—was of a sort to put him right on the record in case an account of his adventures should reach his correspondent by some other way. He would have written it promptly in any circumstances. It was the more apposite because he had promised to write every Sunday to Miss Strangford — to whom he was engaged.

VII



Maltham left his office early the next afternoon and went down the Point again. He had no headache, the wind had shifted to the southward, and all about him was a flood of spring sunshine. Yet even under these cheerful conditions he found the Point rather drearily desolate. He gave the graveyard a wide berth when he came to it, and looked away from it. His desire was strong that he might forget where he had seen Ulrica's name for the first time. He was not superstitious, exactly; but his sub-consciousness that the direction in which he was sliding—along the lines of least resistance—was at least questionable, made him rather open to feelings about bad and good luck.

Being arrived at Eutaw Castle, he inferred

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from what the Major said and from what Ulrica looked that the domestic storm of the previous day had been a vigorous one—and was glad that he had kept out of it. But it had blown over pretty well, and his good-natured chaff about their adventure swept away the few remaining clouds.

"It is veah handsome of yo', suh," said the Major, "to treat the matteh as yo' do. My daughteh's conduct was most inexcusable—fo' when she cahried yo' into that great dangeh she broke heh sacred wo'd to me."

"But it was quite as much my fault as hers," Maltham answered. "I should not have let her go. You see, the sailing was so delightfully exciting that we both lost our heads a little. Luckily, I got mine back before it was too late."

"Yo' behaved nobly, suh, nobly! My daughteh has told me how youah only thought was of heh dangeh, and how white yo' went when yo' realized youah inability to save heh if the boat went down. Those weh the feelings of a gentleman, suh, and of a veahy gallant gentleman—such as yo' suahly ah. Youah conduct could not have been fineh, Mr. Maltham, had yo' been bo'n and bred in South Cahrolina. Suh, I can say no mo' than that!"

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Ulrica took little part in the talk. Her eyes were dull and she moved languidly, as though she were weary. Not until her father left the room—going to fetch his maps and charts, that he might demonstrate the Point's glorious future—did she speak freely.

"I could not sleep last night, Mr. Maltham," she said hurriedly. "I lay awake the whole night—thinking about what I had done, and about what you must think about me for doing it. If I had drowned you, after breaking my word to father that way, it would have been almost murder. It was very noble of you, just now, to say that it was as much your fault as it was mine. But it was not. It was my fault all the way through."

"But the danger was just as great for you as it was for me," Maltham answered. "You would have been drowned too, you know."

"Oh, that would not have counted. It would not have counted at all. I should have got only what I deserved."

Maltham came close to her and took her hand. "Don't you think that it would have counted for a good deal to *me*?" he asked. Then he dropped her hand quickly and moved away from her as the Major re-entered the room.

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Inasmuch as he would have been drowned along with her, this speech was lacking in logic; but Ulrica, who was not on the lookout for logic just then, was more than satisfied with it. Suddenly she was elate again. For the dread that had kept her wakeful had vanished: his second thoughts about the peril into which she had taken him had not set him against her—he still was the same! She could not answer him with her lips, but she answered him with her eyes.

Maltham's feelings were complex as he saw the effect that his words had upon her. He had made several resolutions not to say anything of that sort to her again. Even if she did like flirting (as he had put it in his own mind) it was not quite the thing, under the existing conditions, for him to flirt with her. He resolutely kept the word flirting well forward in his thoughts. It agreeably qualified the entire situation. As he very well knew, Miss Strangford was not above flirting herself. But it was not easy to classify under that head Ulrica's sudden change in manner and the look that she had given him. In spite of himself, his first impression of her would come back and get in the way of the new impression that he very

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much wished to form. When he first had seen her—only the day before, but time does not count in the ordinary way in the case of those who have been close to the gates of death together—he had felt the fire that was in her, and had known that it slumbered. After what he had just seen in her eyes he could not conquer the conviction that the fire slumbered no longer and that he had kindled its strong flame.

Nor did he wholly wish to conquer this conviction. It was thrillingly delightful to think that he had gained so great a power over her, for all her queenliness, in so short a time. Over Miss Strangford—the contrast was a natural one—he had very little power. That young lady was not queenly, but she had a notable aptitude for ruling—and came by it honestly, from a father whose hard head and hard hand made him conspicuous even among Chicago men of affairs. It was her strength that had attracted him to her; and the discovery that with her strength was sweetness that had made him love her. He was satisfied that she loved him in return—but he could not fancy her giving him such a look as Ulrica had just given him; still less could he fancy her whole being irradiated by a touch and a word.

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And so he came again to the same half-formed conclusion that he had come to in the boat on the preceding day: he would let matters drift along pleasantly a little farther before he set them as they should be with a strong hand.

This chain of thought went through his mind while the Major was exhibiting the maps and expounding the Point's future; and his half-conclusion was a little hastened by the Major's abrupt stop, and sudden facing about upon him with: "I feah, suh, that yo' do not quite follow me. If I have not made myself cleah, suh, I will present the matteh in anotheh way."

Maltham shot a quizzical glance at Ulrica—which made her think that she knew where his thoughts had been wool-gathering, and so brought more light to her eyes—and answered with a becoming gravity: "The fact is I didn't quite catch the point that you were making, Major, and I'll be very much obliged if you'll take the trouble to go over it again."

"It is no trouble—it is a pleasuah, suh," the Major replied with an animated affability. And with that he was off again, and ran on for an hour or more—until he had established the

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glorious future of Minnesota Point in what he believed to be convincing terms. "When the time to which I am looking fo'wa'd comes, Mr. Maltham, and it will come veyh soon, suh," he said in enthusiastic conclusion, "it stands to reason that the fo'tunes of this great metropolis of the No' thwest will be fo'eveh and unchangeably established. Only I must wahn yo', suh, that we must begin to get ready fo' it right away. We must take time by the fo'lock and provide at once—I say at once, suh—fo' the needs of that magnificent futuah that is almost heah now!"

He took a long breath as he finished his peroration, and then came down smiling to the level of ordinary conversation and added: "I feah, Mr. Maltham, that I pehmit my enthusiasm to get away with me a little. I feah I may even boah yo', suh. I promise not to say anotheh wohd on the subject this evening. And now, as it is only a little while befo' suppeh, we cannot do betteh, suh, than to take a drink."

Maltham had not intended to stay to supper. He even had intended not to. But he did—and on through the evening until the Major had to warn him that he either must consent to sleep

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in Eutaw Castle or else hurry along up the Point before the ferry-boat stopped running for the night. The Major urged him warmly to stay. Finding that his invitation certainly would not be accepted, he went off for a lantern—and was rather put out when Maltham declined it and said that he could find his way very well by the light of the stars.

Actually, Maltham did not find his way very well by the light of the stars. Two or three times he ran against trees. Once—this was while he was trying to give the graveyard a wide offing—he stumbled over a root and fell heavily. When he got up again he found that he had wrenched his leg, and that every step he took gave him intense pain. But he was glad of his floundering against trees, and of his fall and the keen pain that followed it—for he was savage with himself.

And yet it was not his fault, he grumbled. Why had the Major gone off that way to hunt up a lantern—and so left them alone? Toward the end of his walk—his pain having quieted his excitement, and so lessened his hatred of himself—he added much more lightly: “But what does a single kiss amount to, after all?”

VIII



It was on a day in the early autumn that Maltham at last decided definitely — making effective his half-formed resolution of the spring-time — to stop drifting and to set things as they should be with a strong hand. But he had to admit, even as he formed this resolution, that setting things quite as they should be no longer was within his power.

The summer had gone quickly, most astonishingly quickly, he thought; and for the most part pleasantly — though it had been broken by certain interludes, not pleasant, during which he had been even more savage with himself than he had been during that walk homeward from Eutaw Castle in the dark. But, no matter how it had gone, the summer definitely was ended — and so were his amusing sessions with the

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Major over the future of Minnesota Point, and his sails with Ulrica on the lake and about the bay. Ice already had begun to form in the sheltered parts of the harbour, and the next shift of wind into the North would close the port for the winter by freezing everything hard and fast. All the big ships had steamed away eastward. On the previous day he had despatched the last vessel of his own line. His work for the season was over, and he was ready to return to Chicago. In fact, he had his berth engaged on that night's train. Moreover, in another month he was to be married: in her latest letter Miss Strangford had fixed the day. Then they were going over to the Riviera, and probably to Egypt. In the spring they were coming back again, but not to Duluth nor even to Chicago. He was to take charge of the Eastern office of the line, and their home would be in New York. These various moves were so definite and so final as to justify him in saying to himself, as he did say to himself, that the Duluth episode was closed.

He had hesitated about going down to Eutaw Castle to say good-bye, but in the end had perceived that the visit was a necessity. The Major and Ulrica knew that he was to leave

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Duluth when navigation was closed for the winter—indeed, of late, Ulrica had referred to that fact frequently—but he had not confided to them the remainder of his rather radical programme. He meant to do that later by letter—from the Riviera or from Egypt. In the mean time, until he was married and across the Atlantic, it was essential to keep unbroken the friendly relations which had made his summer—even with its bad interludes—so keenly delightful to him; and to go away without paying a farewell visit he knew would be to risk a rupture that very easily might lead on to a catastrophe. Moreover, as he said to himself, there need not be anything final about it. Even though the harbour did freeze, the railways remained open—and it was only sixteen hours from Chicago to Duluth by the fast train. To suggest that he might be running up again soon would be a very simple matter: and would not be straining the truth, for he knew that the pull upon him to run up in just that way would be almost irresistibly strong.

In fact, the pull was of such strength that all of his not excessive will power had to be exerted to make him go away at all—at least, to go away alone. Very many times he had thought of the

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possibility of reversing his programme completely: of making his wedding journey with Ulrica, and of writing from some far-off place to Miss Strangford that he had happened to marry somebody else and that she was free. But each time that he had considered this alternative he had realized that its cost would come too high: a break with his own people, the loss of the good berth open to him in New York, the loss of his share of Miss Strangford's share of the grain-elevators and other desirable properties which would come to her when her father died. But for these practical considerations, as he frequently and sorrowfully had assured himself, he would not have hesitated for a moment—being satisfied that, aside from them, such a reversal of his plans would be better in every way. For he knew that while Miss Strangford had and Ulrica had not his formal promise to marry her, it was Ulrica who had the firmer hold upon his heart; and he also knew that while Ulrica would meet his decision against her savagely—and, as he believed, feebly—with her passion, Miss Strangford would meet the reverse of that decision calmly and firmly with her strength. The dilemma so nearly touched the verge of his en-

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durance that he even had contemplated evading it altogether by shooting himself. But he had not got beyond contemplation. For that sort of thing he was lacking in nerve.

It was because facing what he knew was a final parting—even though Ulrica would not know it—would be so bitter hard for him that he had hesitated about making his visit of good-bye. But when he had decided that it was a necessity—that the risk involved in not making it outweighed the pain that it would cost him—he came about again: adding to his argument, almost with a sob, that he could not go away like that, anyhow—that he *must* see her once more!

And so he went down the Point again, knowing that he went for the last time—and on much the same sort of a day, as it happened, as that on which his first visit had been made: a grey, chill day, with a strong wind drawing down the lake that tufted it with white-caps and that sent a heavy surf booming in upon the shore. He had no headache, but he had a heartache that was still harder to bear.

He had intended to take the tram-car—that he might hurry down to the Castle, and get through with what he had to do there, and so away again quickly. But when he had crossed

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the canal he let the car go off without him—for the good reason that the meeting and the parting might not come so soon. And for this same reason he walked slowly, irresolutely. Once or twice he halted and almost turned back. It all was very unlike his brisk, assured advance on that far back day—ages before, it seemed to him—when he went down the Point for the first time.

As he went onward, slowly, he was thinking about that day: how it had been without intention that he turned eastward instead of westward when he started on his walk; how a whim of the moment had led him to cross the canal; how the mere chance of the three church-bound women hurrying into the ferry-boat had prevented his immediate return. He fell to wondering, dully, what “chance” is, anyway—this force which with a grim humour uses our most unconsidered actions for the making or the unmaking of our lives; and the hopeless puzzle of it all kept his mind unprofitably employed until he had passed the last of the little houses, and had gone on through the stunted pines, and so was come to the desolate graveyard.

He did not shun the graveyard, as he had shunned it all the summer long. The need for that was past—now that, in reality, Ulrica’s

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name had come to be to him a name upon a grave. For a while he stood with his arms resting on the broken fence, looking before him in a dull way and feeling a dull surprise because he found the dismal place still precisely as he remembered it. That in so very long a time it should not have become more ruinous seemed to him unreasonable. Then he walked on past the little church, still slowly and hesitatingly, and so came at last to the Castle. Oddly enough, the Major was standing again at the same lower window, and saw him, and came out to welcome him. For a moment he had a queer feeling that perhaps it still was that first day—that he might have been dozing in the pine woods, somewhere, and that the past summer was all a dream.

The Major was beaming with friendliness. “Aha, Masteh Geo’ge, I’m glad to see yo’ and to congratulate yo’!” he said heartily. And he gave Maltham a cordial dig in the ribs as he added: “Yo’ ah a sly dog, a vehy sly dog, my boy, to keep youah secret from us! But I happened to be up in town yestehday, and by the mehest chance I met Captain Todd, of youah boat, and he told me why yo’ ah going back to Chicago in such a huhy, suh! It is a great match, a magnificent match that yo’ ah mak-

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ing, Geo'ge, and I congratulate yo' with all my haht. I should be glad of the oppo'tunity to congratulate Miss Strangfo'd also. Fo' I am not flattehing yo', Geo'ge, when I tell yo' that she could not have found a betteh husband had she gone to look fo' him in South Cahrolina. Suh, I can say no mo' than that!"

The Major's speech was long enough, fortunately, for Maltham to get over the shock of its beginning before he had to answer it. But even with that breathing space his answer was so lame that the Major had to invent an excuse for its lack of heartiness. "I don't doubt that afteh youah chilly walk, Geo'ge, yo' ah half frozen," he said. "Come right in and have a drink. It will do yo' good, suh. It will take the chill out of youah bones!"

Maltham was glad to accept this invitation, and the size of the drink that he took did the Major's heart good. "That's right, Geo'ge!" he said with great approval. "A South-Cahrolinian couldn't show a betteh appreciation of good liquoh than that!" He raised his glass and continued: "I drink, suh, to Miss Strangfo'd's health, and to youahs. May yo' both have the long lives of happiness that yo' both de-sehve!"

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He put down his empty glass and added: "I will call Ulrica. She will be glad to see yo' and to offeh yo' heh congratulations." He paused for a moment, and then went on in a less cheerful tone: "But I must wahn yo', Geo'ge, that she has a bad headache and is not quite hehself to-day—and so may not manifest that wahm co'diality in regahd to youah present and futuah happiness that she suahly feels. I confess, Geo'ge," the Major continued anxiously, "I am not quite comfo'table about heh. She seems mo' out of so'ts than a meah headache ought to make heh. And fo' the last month and mo', as yo' may have obsehved youahself, she has not seemed to be hehself at all. I don't mind speaking this way frankly to yo', Geo'ge, fo' yo' know how my haht is wrapped up in heh. As I once told yo', it was only my love fo' that deah child that kept me alive when heh motheh left me," the Major's voice was very unsteady, "and it is God's own truth that if anything went wrong with heh; if—if I weh to lose heh too, Geo'ge, I suahly should want to give right up and die. I could not live without heh—I don't think that I could live without heh fo' a single day!"

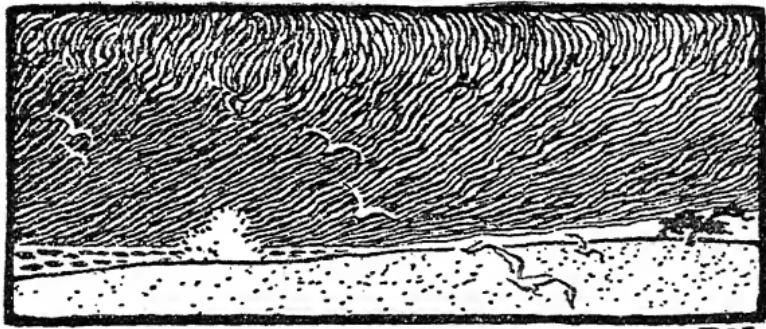
There were tears in the Major's eyes as he

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spoke, and his last word was almost a sob. Maltham was very pale. He did not attempt an answer.

"Thank yo', Geo'ge," the Major went on presently. "I see by youah looks that I have youah sympathy. I am most grateful to yo' fo' it, most grateful indeed!" In a moment he added: "Hahk! She's coming now! I heah heh step outside. Hahk how heavy and slow it is—and she always as light on heh feet as a bird! To heah heh walk that way almost breaks my haht!" And then he checked himself suddenly, and tried to look rather unusually cheerful as Ulrica entered the room.

IX



Being braced to meet some sort of a storm, Maltham was rather put about by not encountering it. Ulrica certainly was looking the worse

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for her headache—her eyes were duller than usual, and there were dark marks under them, and she was very pale; but she did not seem to be at all excited, and the greeting that she gave him was out of the ordinary only in that she did not offer him her hand. He drew a quick breath, and the tense muscles of his mind relaxed. If she were taking it in that quiet way, he thought, he had worked himself into heroics for nothing. And then, quite naturally, he felt a sharp pang of resentment because she did take it so quietly. Her calmness ruffled his self-love.

As she remained silent, making no reference to Maltham's engagement, the Major felt that the proprieties of the case were not being attended to and prompted her. "I have been wishing Geo'ge joy and prospehrity, my deah," he said. "Have yo' nothing to say to him youahself about his coming happiness?"

"Yes," she answered slowly, "I have a great deal to say to him—so much that I am going to carry him off in the *Nixie* to say it." She turned to Maltham and added: "You will come with me for a last sail, will you not?"

Maltham hesitated, and then answered doubtfully: "Isn't it a little cold for sailing to-day?

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Your father says that you are not feeling well. I do think that it will be better not to go—unless you really insist upon it, of course."

"Yo' mustn't think of such a thing!" the Major struck in peremptorily. "The weatgeh is like ice. Yo' will catch yo' death of cold!"

"It is no colder, father, than that day when I took George out in the *Nixie* for the first time—and it will do my head good," Ulrica answered. And added, to Maltham: "I do insist. Come!"

Against the Major's active remonstrance, and against Maltham's passive resistance, she carried her point. "Come!" she said again—and led Maltham out by the side door into the ragged garden. There she left him for a moment and returned to her father—who was standing in a very melancholy way before the fire.

"Do not mind, father," she said. "It is the best thing for me—it is the only thing for me."

He looked at her inquiringly, puzzled by her words and by her vehement tone. Suddenly she put her arms around his neck and kissed him. "Remember always, father, that I have loved you with my whole heart for almost my whole life long. And remember always," she

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went on with a curiously savage earnestness, “that I am loving you with my whole heart—with every bit of it—to-day!”

“I am suah yo’ ah, my daughteh,” the Major answered, very huskily.

She kissed him again, holding him tight in her arms. Then she unclasped her arms with a sudden quick energy and swiftly left the room.

She led Maltham silently to the boat, and silently—when she had cast off the mooring—motioned to him to enter it. He found this silence ominous, and tried to break it. But the commonplace words which he wanted to speak would not come.

And then, as he sat in the stern and mechanically steadied the tiller while she hoisted the sail, the queer feeling again came over him that it still was that wonderful first day. This feeling grew stronger as all that he remembered so well was repeated: Ulrica’s rapid movement aft to the tiller; his own shifting of his seat; her quick loosing of the centreboard as the wind caught them; and then the heeling over of the boat, and her steady motion, and the bubbling hiss of the water beneath the bow. It all so lulled him, so numbed his sense of time and fact,

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that suddenly he looked up in her face and smiled—just as he had done on that first day.

But the look in Ulrica's eyes killed his smile, and brought him back with a sharp wrench to reality. Her eyes no longer were dull. They were glowing—and they seemed to cut into him like knives.

"Well," she asked, "have you anything to say for yourself?"

"No," he answered, "except that fate has been too strong for me."

"Fate sometimes is held accountable for a great deal," she said dryly, but with a catch in her voice.

They were silent again, and for a long while. The boat was running down the bay rapidly—even more rapidly, the wind being much stronger, than on that first day. They could hear, as they had not heard then, the surf crashing upon the outer beach of the Point.

The silence became more than he could stand. "Can you forgive me?" he asked at last.

Ulrica looked at him with a curious surprise. "No," she answered quite calmly. "Think for a moment about what you have done and about what you intend to do. Do you not see that it is impossible?"

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"But I love you!" he cried eagerly. "I love you more than I can tell. It is not my will that is separating us—it is fate!"

Her look softened for an instant as he began, but as he ended it hardened again. She did not answer him. A strong gust of wind heeled the boat farther over. They were going at a slashing rate. Before them the inlet was opening. The booming of the surf was very loud.

He saw that his words had taken hold upon her, and repeated them: "I do love you, Ulrica—and, oh, you don't know how very wretched I have been! More than once in this past month I have been very near killing myself."

She gave him a searching look, and seemed satisfied that he spoke the truth. "I am glad that you have wanted to kill yourself," she said slowly and earnestly. They were at the mouth of the inlet. As she spoke, she luffed sharply and they entered it close-hauled.

"Yes," she repeated, speaking still more earnestly, "I am very glad of that. It makes me feel much easier in my mind about what I am going to do."

Her tone startled him. He looked up at her quickly and anxiously. "What are you going to do?" he asked.

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"Drown you," she answered simply.

For an instant he did not take in the meaning of her words. Then his face became very white, though he tried to smile. His voice shook as he said: "I do not think that this is a good time for joking." The boat was biting her way into the wind sharply, plunging and bucketing through the partly spent waves which came in from outside.

"You know that I am not joking," Ulrica answered very quietly. "I am going to drown you, and to drown myself too. I have thought it all out, and this seems the best thing to do. It is the best for father," her voice trembled, "and it is the best," she went on again, firmly, "for me. As for you, it does not matter whether it is the best for you or not—it is what you deserve. For you are a liar and a traitor—a liar and a traitor to me, and to that other woman too!" As she spoke these last words her calmness left her, and there was the ring of passionate anger in her tone. The fire that she had been smothering, at last was in full blaze.

They were at the very mouth of the inlet. The white-capped surface of the lake swelled and tossed before them. The boat was wallowing heavily.

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Maltham's paleness changed to a greenish-grey. He uttered a shrill scream—a cry of weakly helpless terror. "Put about! For God's sake put about!" he gasped. "We shall be drowned!"

For answer, she hauled the sheet a little and brought the boat still closer into the wind—heading straight out into the lake. "I told you once that the *Nixie* could sail into the wind's eye," she said, coolly. "Now she is doing it. Does she not go well?"

At that, being desperate, he rallied a little. Springing to his feet, but standing unsteadily, he grasped the tiller and tried to shift the helm. Ulrica, standing firmly, laid her hand flat against his breast and thrust him away savagely—with such force that he reeled backward and fell, striking against the combing and barely missing going over the side.

"You fool!" she exclaimed. "Do you not see that it is too late?" She did not trouble herself to look at him. Her gaze was fixed in a keen ecstasy on the great oncoming waves.

What she said was true—it was too late. They were fairly out on the open lake, and all possibility of return was gone. To try to go about would be to throw the *Nixie* into the

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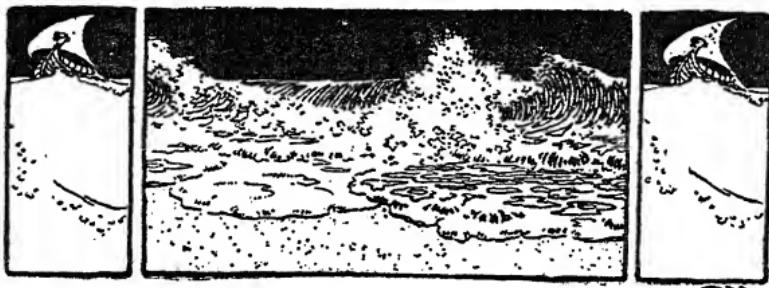
trough of the sea—and so send her rolling over like a log. At the best, the little boat could live in that surge and welter for only a very few minutes more.

Maltham did not attempt to rise. His fall had hurt him, and what little was left of his spirit was cowed. He lay in a miserable heap, uttering little whimpering moans. The complaining noise that he made annoyed her. For the last time she looked at him, burning him for an instant with her glowing eyes. "Silence, you coward!" she cried, fiercely—and at her strong command he was still. Then her look was fixed on the great oncoming waves again, and she cast him out from her mind.

Even in her rage—partly because of it—Ulrica felt in every drop of her Norse blood the glow and the thrill of this glorious battle with great waters. The sheer delight of it was worth dying for—and so richly worth living through to the very last tingling instant that she steered with a strong and a steady hand. And again—as she stood firmly on the tossing boat, her draperies blown close about her, her loosened hair streaming out in golden splendour—she was Aslauga's very self. Sorrow and life together were ending well for her—in high

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emotion that filled and satisfied her soul. Magnificent commanding, defiant, she sailed on in joyful triumph: glad and eager to give herself strongly to the strong death-clasp of the waves.



The Death-Fires of Les
Martigues

The Death-Fires of Les Martigues

I

“God keep you from the she-wolf, and from your heart’s deep desire!”

That is one of our old sayings here in Provence. I used to laugh at it when I was young. I do not laugh at it now. When those words come into my heart, and they come often, I go by the rough hard way that leads upward to Notre Dame de la Garde until I come to the Crime Cross—it is a wearying toil for me to get up that steep hill-side, I am so stiff and old now—and there I cast fresh stones upon the heap at the foot of the cross. Each stone cast there, you know, is a prayer for forgiveness for some hidden crime: not a light fault, but a crime. The stones must be little stones, yet

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the heap is very wide and high — though every winter, when the great mistral are blowing across the Étang de Berre, the little stones are whirled away down the hill-side. I do not know how this custom began, nor when; but it is a very old custom with us here in Les Martigues.

Once in every year I go up to the Crime Cross by night. This is on All Souls Eve. First I light the lamp over Magali's breast where she lies sleeping in the graveyard: going to the graveyard at dusk, as the others do, in the long procession that creeps up thither from the three parts of our town—from Jonquières, and the Isle, and Ferrières — to light the death-fires over the dear dead ones' graves. I go with the very first, as soon as the sun is down. I like to be alone with Magali while I light the little lamp that will be a guide for her soul through that night when souls are free; that will keep it safe from the devils who are free that night too. I do not like the low buzzing of voices which comes later, when the crowd is there, nor the broken cries and sobs. And when her lamp is lit, and I have lit my mother's lamp, I hurry away from the graveyard and the moaning people—threading my steps among the graves on

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which the lights are beginning to glimmer, and through the oncoming crowd, and then by the lonely path through the olive-orchards, and so up the stony height until I come at last to the Crime Cross—panting, aching—and my watch begins.

Up on that high hill-side, open to the west, a little of the dying daylight lingers. Eastward, like a big black mirror, lies the great étang; and far away across its still waters the mountain chain above Berre and Rognac rises purple-grey against the darker sky. In the west still are faint crimson blotches, or dashes of dull blood-red—reflected again, and made brighter, in the Étang de Caronte: that stretches away between the long downward slopes of the hills, on which stone-pines stand out in black patches, until its gleaming waters merge into the faint glow upon the waters of the Mediterranean. Above me is the sanctuary of Notre Dame de la Garde, a dark mass on the height above the olive-trees: of old a refuge for sinful bodies, and still a refuge where sinful souls may seek grace in prayer from their agony. And below me, on the slope far downward, is the graveyard: where the death-fires multiply each moment, as more and more lamps are lighted,

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until at last it is like a little fallen heaven of tiny stars. Only in its midst is an island of darkness where no lamps are. That is where the children lie together: the blessed innocents who have died sinless, and who wander not on All Souls Eve because when sweet death came to them their pure spirits went straight home to God. And beyond the graveyard, below it, is the black outspread of the town: its blackness deepened by a bright window here and there, and by the few street lamps, and by the bright reflections which shine up from the waters of its canals.

Seeing all this—yet only half seeing it, for my heart is full of other things—I sit there at the foot of the Crime Cross in the darkness, prayerful, sorrowful, while the night wears on. Sometimes I hear footsteps coming up the rocky path, and then the shadowy figure of a man or of a woman breaks out from the gloom and suddenly is close beside me—and I hear the rattle of little stones cast upon the heap behind me, on the other side of the cross. Presently, the rite ended, whoever it is fades back into the gloom again and passes away. And I know that another sinful soul has been close beside my sinful soul for a moment: seeking in

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penitent supplication, as I am seeking, rest in forgiveness for an undiscovered crime. But I am sure that none of them sees—as I see in the gloom there always—a man's white face on which the moonlight is shining, and beyond that white face the glint of moonlight on a raging sea; and I am sure that on none of their blackened souls rests a burden as heavy as that which rests on mine.

I am very weary of my burden, and old and broken too. It is my comfort to know that I shall die soon. But, also, the thought of that comfort troubles me. For I am a lone man, and childless. When I go, none of Magali's race, none of my race, will be left alive here in Les Martigues. Our death-fires will not be lighted. We shall wander in darkness on All Souls Eve.

II

“God keep you from the she-wolf, and from your heart's deep desire!”

My old mother, God rest her, said that to me when first she began to see that my love was set on Magali—and saw, too, that I was winning from Magali the love that belonged to Jan, who had her promise.

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"It is an old man's lifetime, mother," I said, "since a wolf has been seen near Les Martigues." And I laughed and kissed her.

"Worse than a wolf is a heart that covets what it may not have, Marius," she answered. "Magali is as good as Jan's wife, and you know it. For a year she has been promised to him. She is my dead sister's child, and she is in my care—and in your care too, because you and she and I are all that is left of us, and you are the head of our house, the man. You are doing wickedness in trying to take her away from Jan—and Jan your own close friend, who saved your life out of the sea. The match is a good match for Magali, and she was contented with it until you—living here close beside her in your own house—began to steal away her heart from him. It is rascal work, Marius, that you are doing. You are playing false as a house-father and false as a friend—and God help me that I must speak such words to my own son! That is why I say, and I say it solemnly, 'God keep you from the she-wolf, and from your heart's deep desire!' That desire has no right to be in your heart, Marius. Drag it out of your heart and cast it away!"

But I only laughed and kissed her again,

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and told her that I would take good care of myself if a she-wolf tried to eat me—and so I went away, still laughing, to my fishing in the Gulf of Fos.

But I did not laugh when I was alone in my boat, slipping down the Étang de Caronte seaward. What she had said had made me see things clearly which until then had been half hid in a haze. We had slipped into our love for each other, Magali and I, softly and easily—just as my boat was slipping down the étang. Every day of our lives we were together, in the close way that housemates are together in a little house of four rooms. Before I got up in the morning I could hear her moving near me, only a thin wall between us; and her movements, again, were the last sounds that I heard at night. She waited on me at my meals. She helped my mother to mend my clothes—the very patches on my coat would bring to my mind the sight of her as she sat sewing at night beside the lamp. We were as close together as a brother and a sister could be; and in my dulness I had fancied for a long while that what I had felt for her was only what a brother would feel.

What first opened my eyes a little was the
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way that I felt about it when she gave her promise to Jan. For all our lives Jan and I had been close friends: and most close since that day when the squall struck our boats, as we lay near together, and I went overboard, and Jan—letting his own boat take its chances—came overboard after me because he knew that I could not swim. It was by a hair's-breadth only that we were not drowned together. After we were safe I told him that my life was his. And I meant it, then. Until Magali came between us I would have died for him with a right good will. After that I was ready enough that he should do the dying—and so be gone out of my way.

When he got Magali's promise, I say, my ugly feeling against him began. But it was not very strong at first, and I was not clear about it in my own mind. All that I felt was that, somehow, he had got between me and the sun. For one thing, I did not want to be clear about it. Down in the roots of me I knew that I had no right to that sunshine, and that Jan had—and I could not help thinking about how he had come overboard after me and had held me up there in the tumbling sea, and how I had told him that my life was his. But with this

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went a little thin thought, stirring now and then in the bottom of my mind though I would not own to it, that in giving him my life—which still was his if he wanted it—I had not given him the right to spoil my life for me while leaving me still alive. And I did my best not to think one way or the other, and was glad that it all was a blur and a haze.

And all the while I was living close beside Magali in that little house, with the sound of her steps always near me and the sound of her voice always in my ears. She had a very sweet voice, with a freshness and a brightness in it that seemed to me like the brightness of her eyes—and Magali's great black eyes were the brightest eyes that ever I saw. Even in Arles, where all the women are beautiful, there would be a buzz among the people lining Les Lices when Magali walked there of a feast-day, wearing the beautiful dress that our women wear here in Provence. To look at her made you think of an Easter morning sun.

III

“God keep you from the she-wolf, and from your heart’s deep desire!”

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My mother's words kept on ringing in my ears after I had left her. Suddenly the haze was gone and I saw clearly—and I knew that my heart's deep desire was to have Magali for my very own. And with that sudden coming of clear sight I knew, too, that I could have her. Out of the past came a crowd of memories which proved it to me. In my dull way, I say, I had fancied that I loved Magali as a sister, and I had tried to keep that fancy always by me in my haze. But with the haze gone—swept away by my mother's words as the mistral sweeps away our Mediterranean fogs—I knew that Magali never had been the fool that I had been.

I remembered her looks and her ways with me from the very day when she came to us, when she was just turned of sixteen: how she used sometimes to lay her hand lightly on my shoulder, how she would bend over to look at the net that I was mending until her hair brushed against my cheek or my forehead, how she always was bringing things to show me that I could not see rightly unless she stood very close at my side, and most of all how a dozen times a day she would be flashing at me her great black eyes. And I remembered how moody

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and how strange in her ways she was just before Jan got his promise from her; and how, when she told me that her promise was given, she gave me a look like none that ever I had from her, and said slowly: "The fisherman who will not catch any fish at all because he cannot catch the fish he wants most—is a fool, Marius!"

Yet even then I did not understand; though, as I say, my eyes were opened a little and I had the feeling that Jan had got between me and the sun. That feeling grew stronger because of the way that she treated him and treated me. Jan was for hurrying the marriage, but she kept him dangling and always was putting him off. As for me, I got all sides of her moods and tempers. Sometimes she scarcely would speak to me. Sometimes she would give me looks from those big black eyes of hers that thrilled me through! Sometimes she would hang about me in a patient sad way that made me think of a dog begging for food. And the colour so went out of her face that her big black eyes looked bigger and blacker still.

Then it was that I began to find in the haze that was about me a refuge—because I did not want to see clear. I let my thoughts go out to Magali, and stopped them before they got

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to Jan. It would be time enough, I reasoned—though I did not really reason it: I only felt it—to think about him when I had to. For the passing hours it was enough to have the sweetness of being near Magali—and that grew to be a greater sweetness with every fresh new day. Presently I noticed that her colour had come back again; and it seemed to me—though that may have been only because of my new love of her—that she had a new beauty, tender and strange. Certainly there was a new brightness, a curiously glowing brightness, in her eyes.

For Jan, things went hardly in those days. Having her promise, he had rights in her—as we say in Provence. But he did not get many of his rights. Half the time when he claimed her for walks on the hill-sides among the olive-orchards, she would not go with him—because she had her work to do at home, she said. And there was I, where her work was, at home! For a while Jan did not see beyond the end of his nose about it. I do not think that ever it crossed his mind to think of me in the matter—not, that is, until some one with better eyes than his eyes helped him to see. For he knew that I was his friend, and I suppose that he remembered what I had told him

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about my life being his. And even when his eyes were helped, he would not at first fully believe what he must plainly have seen. But he soon believed enough to make him change his manner toward me, and to make him watch sharp for something that would give him the right to speak words to me which would bring matters to a fair settlement by blows. And I was ready, as I have said—though I would not fairly own it to myself—to come to blows with him. For I wanted him dead, and out of my way.

And so my mother's words, which had made me at last see clearly, stayed by me as I went sailing in my boat softly seaward down the étang. And they struck deeper into me because Jan's boat was just ahead of mine; and the sight of him, and the thought of how he had saved my life only to cross it, made me long to run him down and drown him, and so be quit of him for good and all. I made up my mind then that, whether I killed him or left him living, it would be I who should have Magali and not he.

IV

“God keep you from the she-wolf, and from your heart's deep desire!”

In Great Waters

My mother said that again to me when I came home that night from my fishing; and she said it to me often as the days went on. She saw the change that had come to me, and she knew what was in my soul. It is not wonderful, when you stop to think about it, that a man's mother should know what is in his soul: for the body in which that soul is, the living home of it, is a part of her own. And she grew sad and weary-looking when she found that her words had no hold on me, and there came into her eyes the sorrowful look that comes into the eyes of old people who are soon to die.

But Magali's eyes were the only eyes that I cared for then, and they seemed to me to grow brighter and brighter every day. When she and I walked in the olive-orchards together in the starlight the glow of them outshone the star-glow. It seemed to light up my heart.

I do not think that we talked much in those walks. I do not seem to remember our talking. But we understood each other, and we were agreed about what we were to do. I was old enough to marry as I pleased, but Magali was not—she could not marry without my mother's word. We meant to force that word. Some day we would go off in my boat together—over to

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Les Saintes Maries, perhaps; or perhaps to Marseille. It did not matter where we went. When we came back again, at the end of two or three days, my mother no longer could deny us—she would have to give in. And no one would think the worse of Magali: for that is our common way of settling a tangled love-matter here in Provence.

But I did not take account of Jan in my plans, and that was where I made a mistake. Jan had just as strong a will as I had, and every bit of his will was set upon keeping Magali for himself. I wanted her to break with him entirely, but that she would not do. She was a true Provençale—and I never yet knew one of our women who would rest satisfied with one lover when she could have two. If she can get more than two, that is better still. While I hung back from her, Magali was more than ready to come to me; but when she found me eager after her, and knew that she had a grip on me, she danced away.

And so, before long, Jan again had his walks with her in the olive-orchards by starlight just as I did, and likely enough her eyes glowed for him just as they did for me. When they were off that way together I would get into a

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wild-beast rage over it. Sometimes I would follow them, fingering my knife. I suppose that he felt like that when the turn was mine. Anyhow, the love-making chances which she gave him—even though in my heart I still was sure of her—kept me always watching him; and I could see that he always was watching me. Very likely he felt sure of her too, and that was his reason—just as it was my reason—for not bringing our matter to a fighting end. I was ready enough to kill him, God knows. Unless his eyes lied when he looked at me, he was ready to kill me.

And in that way the summer slipped past and the autumn came, and neither of us gained anything. I was getting into a black rage over it all. Down inside of me was a feeling like fire in my stomach that made me not want to eat, and that made what I did eat go wrong. My poor mother had given up trying to talk to me. She saw that she could not change my way—and, too, I suppose that she pretty well understood it all: for she had lived her life, and she knew the ways of our men and of our women when love stings them here in Provence. Only, her sadness grew upon her with her hopelessness. What I remember most clearly as I think of

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her in those last days is her pale old face and the dying look in her sorrowful eyes.

But seeing her in that way grief-struck only made my black rage blacker and the fire in my stomach burn hotter. I had the feeling that there was a devil down there who all the time was getting bigger and stronger: and that before long he and I would take matters in hand together and settle them for good and all. As for keeping on with things as they were, it was not to be thought of. Better than much more of such a hell-life would be ending everything by killing Jan.

What made me hang back from that was the certainty that if I did kill him—even in a fair fight, with his chance as good as mine—I would lose Magali beyond all hope: for the gendarmes would have me away in a whiff to jail—and then off would go my head, or, what would be just as bad, off I would go head and all to Cayenne. It was no comfort to me to know that Magali would almost cry her eyes out over losing me. Of course she would do that, being a Provençale. But before her eyes were quite out she would stop crying; and then in a moment she would be laughing again; and in another moment she would be freshly in love

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once more—with some man who was not murdered and who was not gone for his lifetime over seas. And all that, also, would be because she was a Provençale.

V

All the devils are let loose on earth on All Souls Eve—that is a fact known to everybody here in Provence. But whether it was one of those loosed devils, or the devil that had grown big in my own inside, that made me do what I did I do not know. What I do know, certainly, is that about dusk on All Saints Day the thought of how I could force things to be as I wanted them to be came into my heart.

My thought was not a new thought, exactly. It was only that I would do what we had planned to do to make my mother give in to us: get Magali into my boat and carry her off with me for a day or two to Les Saintes. But it came to me with the new meaning that in that way I could make Magali give in to me too. When we came back she would be ready enough to marry me, and my mother would be for hurrying our marrying along. It all was as plain and as sure as anything could be. And, as I have

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said, nobody would think the worse of Magali afterward; because that way of cutting through such difficulties is a common way with us in Provence.

And All Souls Eve was the time of all times for doing it. The whole town is in commotion then. In the churches, when the Vespers of All Saints are finished, the Vespers of the Dead are said. Then, just after sunset, the streets are crowded with our people hurrying to the graveyard with their lanterns for the graves. Nothing is thought about but the death-fires. From all the church towers—in Jonquières, in the Isle, in Ferrières—comes the sad dull tolling of bells. After that, for an hour or more, the town is almost deserted. Only the very old, and the very young, and the sick with their watchers, and the bell-ringers in the towers, are left there. Everybody else is in the graveyard, high up on the hill-side: first busied in setting the lights and in weeping over dead loved ones; and then, when the duty to the dead ones is done with, in walking about through the graveyard to see the show. In Provence we take a great interest in every sort of show.

Magali and I had no death-fires to kindle, for in the graveyard were no dead of ours. Our peo-

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ple were of Les Saintes Maries, and there their graves were—and my father, who was drowned at his fishing, had no grave at all. But we went always to the graveyard on All Souls Eve, and most times together, that we might see the show with the others and enjoy the bustle of the crowd. And so there was nothing out of the common when I asked her to come with me; and off we started together—leaving my old mother weeping at home for my dead father, who could have no death-fire lit for him because his bones were lying lost to us far away in the depths of the sea.

Our house was in the eastern quarter of the town, in Jonquières. To reach the graveyard we had to cross the Isle, and go through Ferrières, and then up the hill-side beyond. But I did not mean that we should do that; and when we had crossed the Canal du Roi I said to Magali that we would turn, before we went onward, and walk down past the Fish-market to the end of the Isle—that from there we might see the lights glowing in the dusk on the slope rising above us black against the western sky. We had done that before—it is a pretty sight to see all those far-off glittering points of light above, and then to see their glittering reflections

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near by in the water below—and she willingly came with me.

But I had more in view. Down at the end of the Isle, along with the other boats moored at the wharf there to be near the Fish-market, my boat was lying; and when we were come close to her I said suddenly, as though the thought had entered my head that minute, that we would go aboard of her and run out a little way—and so see the death-fires more clearly because they would be less hidden by the shoulder of the hill. I did not have to speak twice. Magali was aboard of the boat on the instant, and was clapping her hands at the notion—for she had, as all our women have, a great pleasure in following any sudden fancy which promises something amusing and also a little strange. And I was quick after her, and had the lines cast off and began to get up the sail.

“Oh,” she said, “won’t the oars do? Need we bother with the sail for such a little way?”

But I did not answer her, and went on with what I was doing, while the boat drifted quickly out from land before the gusts of wind which struck us harder and harder as we cleared the point of the Isle. Until then I had not thought

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about the weather—my mind had been full of the other and bigger thought. The gusts of wind waked me up a little, and as I looked at the sky I began to have doubts that I could do what I wanted to do; for it was plain that a gale was rising which would make ticklish work for me even out on the Gulf of Fos—and would make pretty near impossible my keeping on to Les Saintes over the open sea. And I had about made up my mind that we must go back, and that I must carry out my plan some other time, when there came a hail to us from the shore.

“Where are you going?” called a voice—and as we turned our looks shoreward there was Jan. He had been following us, I suppose—just as I sometimes had followed him.

Before I could answer him, Magali spoke. “We are going out on the water to see the death-fires, Jan,” she said. “We are going only a very little way.”

Her words angered me. There was something in them that seemed to show that he had the right to question her. That settled me in my purpose. Storm or no storm, on I would go. And I brought the boat up to the wind, so as to lay our course straight down the Étang

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de Caronte, and called out to him: "We are going where you cannot follow. Good-bye!"

And then a gust of wind heeled us over, and we went on suddenly with a dash—as a horse goes when you spur him—and the water boiled and hissed under our bows. In another half-minute we were clear of the shelter of the point, and then the wind came down on us off the hills in a rush so strong that I had to ease off the sheet sharply—and I had a queer feeling about what was ahead of me out on the Gulf of Fos.

"Marius! Marius! What are you doing?" Magali cried in a shiver of fright: for she knew by that time that something was back of it all in my mind. As she spoke I could see through the dusk that Jan was running up the sail of his boat, and in a minute more would be after us.

"I am doing what I ought to have done long ago," I said. "I am taking you for my own. There is nothing to fear, dear Magali. You shall not be in danger. I had meant to take you to Les Saintes. But a gale is rising and we cannot get to Les Saintes to-night. We will run across the Gulf of Fos and anchor in the Grau de Gloria. There is a shepherd's hut

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near the Grau. I will make a fire in it and you can sleep there comfortably, while I watch outside. After all, it makes no difference where we go. I shall have carried you off—when we go back you must be my wife."

She did not understand at first. She was too much frightened with the suddenness of it all, and with the coming of Jan, and with the boat flying on through the rushing of the wind. I looked back and saw that Jan had got away after us. Dimly I could make out his sail through the dusk that lay thick upon the water. Beyond it and above it was a broad patch of brightness where all the death-fires were burning together in the graveyard. We had come too far to see any longer those many points of light singly. In a mass, they made against the black hill-side a great bright glow.

VI

"God keep you from the she-wolf, and from your heart's deep desire!"

My mother's words seemed to sound in my ears loudly, coming with the rush of wind that eddied around me out of the sail's belly. They gave me a queer start, as the thought came with

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them that here at last my heart's deep desire would be mine presently—if only I could snatch it and keep it from the she-wolf of the sea.

Magali was silent—half standing, half sitting, against the weather side of the boat, close in front of me as I stood at the tiller with the sheet in my hand. She had got over her fright. I could tell that by the brightness of her eyes, and by the warm colour in her cheeks that I had a glimpse of as we flashed past the break in the hills where the Mas Labillon stands. And in that moment while the dusk was thinned a little I could see, too, that she was breathing hard. I know what our women are, and I know what she was feeling. Our women like to be fought for, and any one of them gladly would have been in Magali's place—with the two strongest and handsomest men in Les Martigues in a fair way to come to a death-grip for her in the whirl of a rising storm.

Back in the dusk, against the faint glow of the death-fires, I could see the sail of Jan's boat dipping and swaying with the thrusts of the wind-gusts as it came on after me. It had gained a little; and I knew that it would gain more, for Jan's boat was a speedier boat than mine on the wind. Close-hauled, I could walk

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away from him ; but in running down the Étang de Caronte I had no choice in my sailing. Out on the Gulf of Fos, if I dared take that chance, and if he dared follow me, I could bear up to windward and so shake him off—making for the Anse d'Auguette and taking shelter there. But even my hot blood chilled a little at the thought of going out that night on the Gulf of Fos. When we were down near the end of the étang—close to the Salines, where it is widest—the wind that pelted down on us from the hills was terribly strong. It was hard to stand against even there, where the water was smooth. Outside, it would be still stronger, and the water would be all in a boil. And at the end, to get into the Anse d'Auguette, we should have to take the risk of a roaring sea abeam.

But any risk was better than the risk of what might happen if Jan overhauled me. Now that I fairly had Magali away from him, I did not want to fight him. What might come in a fight in rough water—where the winds and the waves would have to be reckoned with, and with the most careful reckoning might play tricks on me—was too uncertain ; while if I could stand him off and get away from him,

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so that even for one night I could keep Magali with me, the game would be won. After that, if he wanted it, I would fight him as much as he pleased.

The thought that I would win—in spite of Jan and in spite of the storm, too—made all my blood tingle. More by habit than anything else I sailed the boat: for my eyes were fixed on Magali's eyes, shining there close to me, and my heart was full of her. We did not speak, but once she turned and looked at me—bending forward a little, so that her face was within a foot of mine. What she saw in my eyes was so easy to read that she gave all at once a half-laugh and a half-sob—and then turned away and peered through the blustering darkness toward Jan's sail. Somehow, the way she did that made me feel that she was holding the balance between us; that she was waiting—as the she among wild beasts waits while the males are fighting for her—for the stronger of us to win. After that I was ready to face the Gulf of Fos.

The time for facing the gulf was close on me, too. We had run through the canal of the Salines and were out in the open water of Bouc—the great harbour at the mouth

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of the étang. The gale roared down on us, now that there was little land to break it, and we began to hear the boom of the waves pounding on the rocks outside. I luffed well into the wind and bore up for the narrows opening seaward where the Fort de Bouc light-house stands. The water still was not rough enough to trouble us. It would not be rough until we were at the very mouth of the narrows. Then, all at once, would come the crush and fury of the wind and sea. I knew what it would be like: and again a chill shot through me at the thought of risking everything on that one great chance. But I had one thing to comfort me: the moon had risen—and while the light came brokenly, as the clouds thinned and thickened again, there was brightness enough even at the darkest for me to lay a course when I got out among the tumbling waves. Yet only a man half mad with passion would have thought of fronting such a danger; and even I might have held back at the last moment had I not been stung to go on.

Jan had so gained on me in the run down the étang that as we came out from the canal of the Salines his boat was within less than a dozen rods of mine; and as I hauled my sheet and bore up for the narrows he shot down upon us

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and for a moment was almost under our stern. And at that Magali gave a little jump and a half-gasp, and laid her hand upon mine, crying: "Marius! Quick! Sail faster! He will take me from you! Get me away! Get me away!"

And then I knew that she no longer balanced us, but that her heart was for me. After that I would have faced not only the Gulf of Fos but the open Mediterranean in the worst storm that ever blew.

VII

"God keep you from the she-wolf, and from your heart's deep desire!"

The words were in my ears again as we went flying on toward the narrows—with the reflection of the flame in the light-house making a broad bright path for us, and the flame itself rising high before us against the cloud-rack like a ball of fire. But God was not with me then, and I gave those warning words no heed. I was drunk with the gladness that came to me when Magali made her choice between us; and all that I thought was that even if we did go down together, out there in the Gulf of Fos, I still would be keeping her from Jan and holding her

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for my own. That there might be any other ending for us never crossed my mind.

Jan did not think, I suppose, that I would dare to go outside the harbour. He was in a rage too, no doubt; but, still, he must have been a good deal cooler than I was—for a rage of hate does not boil in the very bones of a man, as a rage of love does—and so cool enough to know that it was sheer craziness to take a boat out into that sea. What I meant to do must have come to him with suddenness—as we drew so close to the light-house that the flame no longer was reflected ahead of us, and the narrows were open over my starboard bow, and I let the boat fall off from the wind and headed her into the broken water made by the inroll of half-spent waves. In my run close-hauled I had dropped him, but not so much as I thought I should, and as I came on the wind again—and hung for a moment before gathering fresh headway—he ranged up once more within hail.

“Where are you going? Are you crazy?” he called out—and though he must have shouted with all the strength of his big lungs his voice came thin through the wind to us, and broken by the pounding of the sea.

“Where you won’t dare to follow!” I called

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back to him—and we went rushing on below the big old fort, that carries the light on its tower, through the short passage between the harbour and the Gulf of Fos.

Something he answered, but what it was I do not know: for as we cleared the shelter of the fort—but while the tail of rock beyond it still was to windward, so that I could not luff—down with a crash on us came the gale. I could only let fly the sheet—but even with the sheet all out over we went until the sail was deep in the water, and over the leeward gunwale the waves came hissing in. I thought that there was the end of it; but the boat had such way on her that even on her beam ends and with the sail dragging she went on until we had cleared the rocks; and then I luffed her and she rose slowly, and for ~~the~~ moment was safe again with her nose in the wind.

Magali's face was dead white—like a dead woman's face, only for her shining eyes. She fell to leeward as the boat went over—I could not spare a hand to save her—and struck hard against the gunwale. When the boat righted and she got up again her forehead was bleeding. On her white face the blood was like a black stain. But she put her hand on mine and

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said: "I am not frightened, Marius. I love you!"

Jan was close aboard again. As our way had deadened he had overhauled us; and because he saw what had happened to my boat he was able to bring his boat through the narrows without going over.

"Marius! Marius! For God's sake, for Magali's sake, put about!" he shouted. "It is the only chance to save her. Put about, I say!"

He was only a little way to leeward of us, but I barely made out his words. The wind was roaring past us, and the waves were banging like cannon on the rocks close by.

What he said was the truth, and I knew it. I knew that the gale was only just beginning, and that no boat could live through it for another hour. And then one of the devils loose on that All Souls Eve, or perhaps it was my own devil inside of me, put a new evil thought into my heart: making clear to me how I might get rid of Jan for good and all, and without its ending in my losing my head or in my losing Magali by being sent overseas. It was a chance, to be sure, and full of danger. But just then I was ready for any danger or for any chance.

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"Lie down in the bottom of the boat, Magali," I called sharply. "That is the safest place for you. We are going about."

I spoke the truth to Magali; but, also, I did not want her to see what happened. She did what I told her to do, and then I began to wear the boat around. How I did it without swamping, I do not know. Perhaps the devils of All Souls Eve held up my mast through the black moments while we lay wallowing in the trough of the sea. But I did do it; and when I was come about I headed straight for Jan's boat —lying dead to leeward of me, not twenty yards away. The clouds thinned suddenly and almost the full light of the moon was with us. We could see each other's faces plainly—and in mine he saw what I meant to do.

"It will be all of us together, Marius!" he called to me. "Do you want to murder Magali too?"

But I did not believe that it would be all of us together: for I knew that his boat was an old one, and that mine was new and strong. And, also, the devils had me in their hold. The gale was behind me, driving me down upon him like a thunder-bolt. As I shot close to him the moon shone out full for a moment through a

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rift in the clouds. In that moment I saw his face clearly. The moonlight gleamed on it. It was a ghastly dead white. But I do not suppose that it was for himself that he was afraid. Jan was not a coward, or he would not have jumped after me when I was drowning in the stormy sea.

Once more he called to me. "Marius! For the sake of Magali—"

And then there was a crashing and a rending of planks as I shot against his boat, and a sudden upspringing of my own boat under me. And after that, for a long while, a roaring of water about me, and my own body tumbled and thrust hither and thither in it, and at last a blow which seemed to dash me down into a vast black depth that was all buzzing with little blazing stars.

But the others were upcast on the rocks dead.

A Sea Upcast

A Sea Upcast

I

WHEN we East Anglians be set to do a thing, we be set firm. We come at what we want by slow thinking, but when we know what we want we hold fast by it—being born stubborn, and also being born staunch. It is the same with our hating and with our loving: we fire slowly, but when at last the fire is kindled it burns so strongly in the very hearts of us—with a white glow, hotter than any flame—that there is no putting it out again short of putting out our lives.

Men and women alike, we are born that way; and we fishermen of the Suffolk and Norfolk coast likewise are bred that way: seeing that from the time we go afloat as youngsters until the time that we are drowned, or are grown so old and rusty that there is no more strength

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for sea-fighting left in us, our lives for the most part are spent in fighting the North Sea. That is a fight that needs stubbornness to carry it through to a finish. Also, it needs knowledge of the ocean's tricks and turns — because the North Sea can do what we East Anglians can't do: it can smile at you and lie. A man must have a deal of training before he can tell by the feel of it in his own insides that close over beyond a still sea and a sun-bright sky a storm is cooking up that will kill him if it can. And even when he feels the coming of it—if he be well to seaward, or if he be tempted by the fish being plenty and by the bareness of his own pockets to hold on in the face of it—he must have more in his head than any coast pilot has if he is to win home to Yarmouth Harbour or to Lowestoft Roads.

For God in his cruelty has set more traps to kill seafarers off this easterly outjut of England, I do believe, than He has set anywhere else in all the world: there being from Covehithe Ness northward to the Winterton Overfalls nothing but a maze of deadly shoals—all cut up by channels in which there is no sea-room—that fairly makes you queazy to think about when you are coming shoreward in a

A Sea Upcast

northeast gale. And as if that were not enough to make sure of man-food for the fishes, the currents that swirl and play among these shoals are up to some fresh wickedness with every hour of the tide-run and with every half shift of wind. Whether you make in for Yarmouth by Hemesby Hole to the north, or by the Hewett Channel to the south, or split the difference by running through Caister Road, it is all one: twisting about the Overfalls and the Middle Cross Sand and the South Scroby, there the currents are. What they will be doing with you, or how they will be doing it, you can't even make a good guess at; all that you can know for certain being that they will be doing their worst by you at the half tide.

At least, though, the Lowestoft men and the Yarmouth men have a good harbour when once they fetch it; and by that much are better off than we Southwold men, who have no harbour at all. With anything of a sea running there is no making a landing under Southwold Cliff—though it is safe enough when once your boat is beached and hauled up there; and so, if the storm gets ahead of us, there is nothing left but to run for Lowestoft: and a nice time we often have of it, with an on-shore gale blowing, work-

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ing up into the Covehithe Channel under the tail of the Barnard Bank! As for beating up to seaward of the Barnard and running in through Pakefield Gat, anybody can try for it who has a mind to—and who has a boat that can eat the very heart out of the wind. Sometimes you do fetch it. But what happens to you most times is best known to the Newcome Shoal. When you have cleared the Barnard—if so be you do clear it—the Newcome lies close under your lee for all the rest of the run. What it has done for us fishermen you can see when the spring tides bare it and show black scraps of old boats wrecked there, and sometimes a gleam of sand-whitened bones.

For a good many years we had another chance, though a poor one, and that was to make a longish leg off shore and then run in before the wind and cross the Barnard into Covehithe Channel through what we called the Wreck Gat—a cut in the bank that the currents made striking against a wrecked ship buried there. The Wreck Gat is gone now—closed by the same storm that nearly closed my life for me—and you will not find it marked nowadays on the charts. Its going was a good riddance. At the best it was a desperate

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bad place to get through; and at its worst it was about the same as a sea pitfall: and that nobody knows better than I do, seeing that I was the last man to get through it alive. But when you happened to be to windward of it, if it served at all, it served better than running down a half mile farther and trying to round the tail of the bank.

Very many craft beside our own fisher-boats find their death-harbour on our East Anglian sands. Our coast, as it has a right to be, is the dread of every sailor man who sails the narrow seas. Great ships, storm - swept on our sands, are sucked down into the depths of them, or are hammered to pieces on the top of them, as light-heartedly as though they were no more than cock-boats. And the supply of ships to be wrecked there is unending—since the half of the trade of the world, they say, sails past our shores. From every land they come: and many and many a one of them comes but never goes. Down on them bangs the northeast wind with a roar and a rattle—and presently our sands have hold of them with a grip that is to keep them fast there till the last day! Sometimes the dead men who were living sailors aboard those ships come ashore to us, though they are

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more like to find graves in the sands that murdered them or to be swept out to sea ; sometimes, by a twist of chance that you may call a miracle, the sea has a fancy for casting one or two of them ashore alive. Dazed and half mad creatures those live ones are, usually : their wits all jangled and shaken by the great horror that has been upon them while they tossed among the waves.

And so, as you may see, we men of the Suffolk and Norfolk coast need the stiff backbone that we have as our birthright for the sea-fighting that is our life-work ; and it is not to be wondered at that our life of sea-fighting makes us still more set and stubborn in our ways.

II

My little Tess came to me, a sea upcast, after one of our great northeast gales. I myself found her : lying where the waves had landed her on the shingle, and where they had left her with the fall of the tide.

I was but a bit of a lad myself, then, going on to be eight years old. Storms had no fright in them for me in those days. What I most was thinking about when one was blowing—while

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my poor mother, if my father was out in his boat, would be looking wild-eyed seaward, or in the bed-room praying for him on her knees —was what I'd be picking up on the shingle when the gale was over and the sea gone down. Later on, when I came to know that at the gale's end I might be lying myself on the shingle, along with the other wreckage, I got to looking at storms in a different way.

That blow that brought my Tess to me had no fears in it for my poor mother, seeing that it came in the night time and my father safe at home. The noise of my father getting up wakened me; and in a sleepy way I watched him from my little bed, when he had the lamp lighted, hurrying his clothes on that he might go down to where his boat was hauled up on the shingle and heave her with the capstan still higher above the on-run of the waves. And as I lay there, very drowsy, watching my father drag his big boots on and hearing the roar of the wind and feeling the shaking that it was giving to our house-walls, there came suddenly the sharp loud bang of a gun.

My father stopped as he heard it—with one leg in the air and his hands gripping the bootstraps, I can see him now. “That's from close

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by!" he said. "God help them—they must be ashore on the Barnard Bank!" Then he jammed his other boot on, jumped into his sou'wester, and was gone on a run. My mother ran to the door—I know now, having myself helped to get men ashore from wrecked ships at my life's peril, what her fear was—and called after him into the darkness: "Don't thou go to putting thy life in danger, George May!" What she said did no good. The wind swallowed her words before they got to him. For a minute or two she stood in the doorway, all blown about; then, putting her weight on it, she got the door shut and came back into the bed-room and knelt by the bedside praying for him. I still was very drowsy. Presently I went off to sleep again, thinking—God forgive me for it!—that if a ship had stranded on the Barnard I'd find some pretty pickings when morning came and the storm was over—and I could get down to the shore.

And that was my first thought when I wakened, and found the sun shining and the wind blowing no more than a gentle breeze. My father was home again, and safe and sound. There had been no chance for a rescue, he said—the ship being deep down in the sands, and all her

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people swept out of her, by the time that daylight came. And so I bolted my breakfast, and the very minute that I had it inside of me I was off down the cliff-path and along the beach northward to find what I could find. All the other Southwold boys were hurrying that way too; but our house being up at the north end of the village gave me the start of all of them but John Heath, who lived close by us, and he came down the cliff-path at my heels.

The Barnard Bank lies off shore from Covehithe Ness, and under the Ness our pickings would be most like to be. At the best they would be but little things—buckets and baskets and brooms and odd oars, and such like—the coast guard men seeing to it that we got no more; but things, all the same, that any boy would jump for: and so away John and I ran together, and we kept together until we were under the Ness—and could see the broken stern-post of the wreck, all that was left to see of her, sticking up from the Barnard going bare with the falling tide. There I passed him—he giving a shout and stopping to pick up a basket that I missed seeing because on my side weed covered it—and so was leading him as we rounded the Ness by a dozen yards. And then it was

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I who gave a shout—and made a dash for a big white bundle that was lying in a nook of the shingle just above the lap of the waves.

John saw the bundle almost as soon as I did, and raced me for it. But I did see it first, and I touched it first, and so it fairly was mine. A white sheet was the outside of it; and at one corner, under the sheet, a bit of a blanket showed. I would have none of John's help as I unwrapped it. He stood beside me, though, and said as I opened it that even if I had touched it first we had seen it together—which wasn't so—and that we must go share and share. I did not answer him, being full of wonder what I was like to come to when I had the bundle undone. In a good deal of a hurry I got the sheet loose, it was knotted at the corners, and then the blanket, and then still another blanket that was under the first one: and when that inner wrapping was opened there was lying—a little live baby! It looked up into my face with its big black eyes, and it blinked them for a minute—having been all shut up in the dark and the sunlight bothering it—and then it smiled at me as if I'd just waked it up not from the very edge of death in the sea but from a comfortable nap in its cradle on land!

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John Heath burst out laughing. "You can have my share of it, George," said he; "we've got babies enough of our own at home." And with that he ran away and began to look again for brooms and buckets along the shore.

But I loved my little Tess from that first sight of her, and I was glad that John had said that I might have his share in her; though of course, because I first saw her and first touched her, he had no real share in her at all. So I wrapped her up again as well as I could in her blankets—leaving the wet sheet lying there—and set off for home along the shore, carrying her in my arms. Tired enough I got before I had lugged my load that long way, and up the cliff, and so to our house door. In the doorway my mother was standing, and I put the bundle in her arms. "Lord save us!" said my mother. "What's the boy got here?"

"Mother," said I, "it's a little beautiful live baby—and I found it, and it's mine!"

III

That was the way that my Tess came to me: and I know now how good my father and my mother were in letting me keep her for my

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own—they with only what my father could make by his fishing to live on, and the wolf never very far away from the door. But the look of those black eyes of hers and the smile in them won my mother's love to her, just as it had won mine; and my mother told me, too, long years afterward, that her heart was hungry for the girl baby that God had not given her—and she said that Tess seemed to be her very own baby from the minute that she took her close to her breast from my tired little arms.

As to where Tess came from—from what port in all the wide world the ship sailed that brought her to us—we had no way of knowing. Nothing but Tess in her bundle came ashore from the wreck; and what was left of the ship burrowed down into the sands so fast and so far that there was to be seen of her only a broken bit of her stern-post at the storm's ending. Even after the set of the currents against her sunken hull, on the next spring tide, had cut through the Barnard Bank and so made the Wreck Gat, no part of her but her broken stern-post ever showed. Tess herself, though, told us what her own name was, and so gave us a notion as to what land she belonged to; but we should have

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been none the wiser for her telling it—she talking in words that were the same as Greek to us—if the Vicar had not lent us a hand.

My finding the baby made a stir in the whole village, and everybody had to have a look at her. In the afternoon along came the Vicar too—smiling through his gold spectacles, as he always did, and swinging his black cane. By that time, having had all the milk she could hold, and a good nap, and more milk again, Tess was as bright as a new sixpence: just as though she had not passed that morning nearer to death than ever she was like to pass again and live. She was lying snug in my mother's arms before the fire, and in her own fashion was talking away at a great rate—and my mother's heart quite breaking because her pretty chatter was all in heathen words that nobody could get at the meaning of. But the Vicar, being very learned, understood her in a minute. "Why, it's Spanish," said he. "It's Spanish as sure as you're born! She's calling you 'madrecita,' Mrs. May—which is the same as 'motherkin,' you know. But I can't make even a guess at the rest of it. Everything ends in 'ita'—real baby-talk."

"Do kindly ask her, sir, what her blessed

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little name is,” said my mother. “It’ll bring her a deal closer to us to know her name.”

“I’ll try her in Latin,” said the Vicar—“that’s the best that I can manage—and it’ll be hit or miss if she understands.” And then he bent over the little tot—she being then a bit over two years old, my mother thought—and asked her what her name was in Latin words.

For a minute there was a puzzled look in the big black eyes of her and her brow puckered. And then she smiled all over her pretty face and answered, as clear as you please: “Tesita.” That a baby no bigger than that understood Latin always has seemed to me most like a miracle of anything that ever I have known!

My mother looked bothered and chap-fallen. “It’s not a real name at all,” she said, and sighed over it.

“It’s a very good name indeed, Mrs. May,” said the Vicar; “only she’s giving you her baby way of saying it. Her name is Theresa. ‘Tesita’ is the same as our ‘Tess’ would be, you know.”

“Theresa! Tess!” cried my mother, brightening up all in a minute. “Why, that was my own dear mother’s name! Her having that name seems to make her in real truth mine, sir!” And

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she hugged the baby close to the heart of her, and all in the same breath cried over it and laughed over it — thinking, I suppose, of her mother dead and buried, and thankful for the daughter that she so longed for that had come to her upcast by the sea.

More than what her name was, as is not to be wondered at, Tess never told us; and the only thing in the world that gave us any knowledge of her—and that no more than that her people were like to be gentlefolk—was a gold chain about her neck, under her little night gown, with a locket fast to it on which were some letters in such a jumble that even the Vicar could not make head nor tail of them, though he tried hard.

IV

Whatever part of the world Tess came from, it was plain enough by the look of her—and more and more plain as she grew up into a tall and lanky girl, and then into a tall slim woman—that Suffolk was a long way off from the land where she was born.

Our Suffolk folk, for the most part, are shortish and thickset and fair and blue eyed. We

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men—being whipped about by the wind and weather, and the sea-salt tanned into us—lose our fairness early and go a bun-brown; but our women—having no salt spray in their faces, and only their just allowance of sunshine—have their blue eyes matched with the red and white cheeks that they were born with; and their hair, though sometimes it goes darkish, usually is a bright chestnut or a bright brown. Also, our women are steady-going and sensible; though I must say that now and then they are a bit hard to get along with: being given to doing their thinking slowly, and to being mighty fast set in their own notions when once they have made their minds up—the same as we men. As for Tess—with her black eyes and her black hair, and her face all a cream white with not a touch of red in it—she was like none of them; and she could think more out-of-the-way things and be more sorts of a girl in five minutes than any Suffolk lass that ever I came across could think or be in a whole year!

Tess was unlike our girls in another matter: she had a mighty hot spit-fire temper of her own. Our girls, the same as our men, are easy-going and anger slowly; but when they do anger they are glowing hot to their very finger-tips, and a

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long while it takes them to cool off. But Tess would blaze up all in a minute—and as often as not with no real reason for it—and be for a while such an out-and-out little fury that she would send everything scudding before her; and then would pull up suddenly in the thick of it, and seem to forget all about it, and like enough laugh at the people around her looking scared! Somehow, though, it was seldom that she let me have a turn of her tantrums; and when she did they'd be over in no time, and she'd have her arms around me and be begging me to kiss her and to tell her that I didn't mind. I suppose that she was that way with me because for my part—having from the very first so loved her that quarreling with her was clean impossible—I used just to stand and stare at her in her passions; and like enough be showing by the look in my eyes the puzzled sorrow that I was feeling in my inside. As to answering her anger with my anger, it never once crossed my mind.

With John Heath things went differently. He would go ugly when she flew out at him—and would keep his anger by him after hers long was over and done with, and would show it by putting some hurt upon her in a dirty way.

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A good many thrashings I gave John Heath, at one time or another, for that sort of thing; and the greatest piece of unreasonableness that Tess ever put on me, which is saying much for it, was on that score: she being then ten years old, or thereabouts, and John and I well turned of sixteen.

Some trick that he played on her—I don't know what it was—set her in a rage against him, and he made her worse by laughing at her, and she ended by throwing sand in his eyes. Then his anger got up, and he caught her—being twice the size of her—and boxed her ears. I came along just then, and I can see the look of her now. She was not crying, as any ordinary child would have been—John having meant to hurt her, and hit hard. She was standing straight in front of him with her little hands gripped into fists as if she meant to fight him, that cream white face of hers gone a real dead white, a perfect blaze of passion in her big black eyes. In another second or so she'd have been flying at him if I'd given her the chance. But I didn't—I sailed right in and myself gave him what he needed; and when I had finished with him I had so well blackened the two eyes of him that he forgot about the sand. But after

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it all was over, so far from being obliged to me, what did Tess do but fall to crying because I'd hurt him, and to saying that he'd only given her what she deserved! For a week and more she would not speak to me, and all that time she was trotting about sorrowfully at John's heels. It seemed as though all of a sudden she had got to loving him because he had played the man and the master to her; and I'm sure that his love for her had its beginning then too.

John's folks and my folks, as I have said, lived up at the north end of the village, a bit apart, and that made us three keep most together while we were little; but Tess never had much to do with the other children, even when she got big enough to be with them at school. They did not get along with her, being puzzled by her whims and fancies and set against her by her spit-fire ways. And she did not get along with them because she was quick about everything and all of them were slow. When she began to grow up, though, matters changed a good deal. The boys—she being like nobody else in the village—picked her out to make love to, and that set the girls by the ears. Tess liked the love-making a deal more than I liked her to like it; and she didn't mind what the girls said to

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her because her wits were nimbler than their wits and she always could give them better than they could send.

So things went while the years went till Tess was turned of seventeen, and was shot up into a tall slim woman in all ways so beautiful as to be, I do believe, the most beautiful woman that God ever made. And then it was that Grace Gryce, damn her for it, found a whip that served to lash her; and so cruel a whip that she was near to lashing the life out of her with it at a single blow.

V

According to our Suffolk notions, Grace Gryce was a beauty: being strongly set up and full built and well rounded, with cheeks as red as strawberries, and blue eyes that for any good looking man had a smile in them, and over all a head of bright-brown hair. Had Tess been out of the way she'd have had things all as she wanted them, not another girl in the village for looks coming near her; and so it was only human nature, I suppose, that she hated Tess for crossing her—making her always go second, and a bad second, with the men.

It was about John Heath, though, that the

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heart of the matter was. All the village knew that Grace fancied him, and that he half fancied her—and would have fancied her altogether had Tess been out of the way. Making up his mind between them—John always was a thick thinker—did not seem to come easy to him. The whims and the ways of Tess—that made a dozen different sorts of girl of her in five minutes—seemed to set him off from her a-most as much as they set him on: being a sort of puzzle, I'm free to say, that other men beside John couldn't well understand. With Grace it was different. She might blow hot or she might blow cold with him; or she might show her temper—she had a-plenty of it—and give him the rough side of her tongue: but what she meant and what she wanted always was plain and clear. To be sure, this is only my guess why he hung in the wind between them. Maybe he set too little store on Tess's love because it came to him too easily; maybe he thought that by seeming to love her lightly he best could hold her fast.

Hold her fast he did, and that is certain. In spite of all her whimsies, he had her love; and it was his, as I have said, from the time when he man-mastered her by boxing the little ears of her—she being only ten years old. Al-

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ways after that, even when she was at her sauciest and her airiest, he had only to speak short and sharp to her and she'd come to heel to him like a dog. Sometimes, seeing her taking orders from him that way was close to setting me wild: I having my whole heart fixed on her, and ready to give the very hands of me to have from her the half of what she gave him. Not but what she loved me too, in her own fashion, and dearly. She showed that by the way that she used to come to me in all her little hurts and troubles; and the sweetness and the comfortingness of her to me and to my mother always, but most when my poor father was drowned, was beyond any words that I have to put it in. But my pain was that the love which she had for me was of the same sort that she had for my mother—and I was not wanting from her love of that kind. And so it cut to the quick of me—I who would have kissed her shoe-soles—to see her so ready always to be meek and humble at a word from John. There were times, and a good many of them—seeing her so dog-faithful to him, and he almost as careless of her as if she had been no more than a dog to him—that I saw red as I looked at him, and got burning hot in the insides of me, and was as close to murder-

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ing him as I well could be and he still go on alive.

Like enough Grace Gryce—being of the same stock that I was, and made much as I was—had the same feeling for Tess that I had for John; and Grace, being a woman, had nothing to stop her from murdering Tess in a woman's way. She would have done it sooner had her wits been quicker. Time and again they had had their word-fights together, and Tess always getting the better of her because Grace's wits, like the rest of her, were heavy and slow.

It was down by the boats, under the Gun Hill, that they fought the round out in which Grace drew blood at last. A lot of the girls were together there and Tess, for a wonder, happened to be with them. They all were saying to her what hard things they could think of; and she, in her quick way, was hitting back at them and scoring off them all. Poor sort of stuff it was that they were giving her: calling her “Miss Fine-Airs” and “Miss Maypole,” and scorning the black eyes and the pale face of her, and girding at her the best they could because in no way was she like themselves.

“It's a pity I'm so many kinds of ugliness!” says Tess in her saucy way, and making it worse

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by laughing. "It's a true pity that I'm not pretty, like all the rest of you, and so am left lonely. If only I'd some of your good looks, you see, I might have, as the rest of you have, a lot of men at my heels."

That was a shot that hit all of them, but it hit Grace the hardest and she answered it. "It's better," said she, "to go your whole life without a man at your heels than it is to spend your whole life dog-tagging at the heels of a man."

The girls laughed at that, knowing well what Grace was driving at. But Tess was ready with her answer and whipped back with it: "Well, it's better to tag at a man's heels and he pleased with it than it is to want to tag there and he not letting you—liking a may-pole, maybe, better than a butter-tub, and caring more, maybe, for grace by nature than for Grace by name."

That turned the joke—only it was no joke—on Grace again; and as the girls had not much more liking for her than they had for Tess, seeing that she spoiled what few man-chances Tess left them, they laughed at her as hard as they could laugh.

Grace's slow anger had been getting hotter and hotter in her. That shot of Tess's, and the girls all laughing at her, brought it to a boil.

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"Who be'st thou, to open thy ugly mouth to me?" she jerked out, with a squeak in her voice and her blue eyes blazing. "Who be'st thou, anyway? Who knows the father or the mother of thee? Who knows what foul folk in what foul land bore thee? Dog-tag thou may'st, but —mark my words—naught will come of it: because thou'rt not fit for John Heath or for any other honest man to have dealings with—thou rotten upcast of the sea!"

Tess was holding her head high and was scornful-looking when this speech began; but the ending of it, so Mary Benacre told my mother, seemed like a knife in her heart. Her face went a sort of a pasty white, so Mary said; and she seemed to choke, somehow, and put her hand up to her throat in a fluttering kind of way as if her throat hurt her. And then she sort of staggered, and made a grab at the boat she was standing by and leaned against it—looking, so Mary said, as if she was like to die.

"Mayhap now thou'l't keep quiet a bit," Grace said, with her hands on her fat hips and her elbows out; and with that, and a flounce at her, turned away. The other girls, all except Mary, went along with Grace; but not talking, and most of them scared-looking: feeling, like

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enough, as men would feel standing by at the end of a knife-fight, when one man is down with a cut that has done for him and there is a smell of blood in the air.

Mary staid behind—she was a good sort, was Mary Benacre—and went to Tess and tried to comfort her. Tess didn't answer her, but just looked at her with a pitiful sort of stare out of her black eyes that Mary said was like the look of some poor dumb thing that had no other way of telling how bad its hurt was. And then, rousing herself up, Tess pushed Mary away from her and started for home on a run. Mary did not follow her, but later on she came and told my mother just what had happened and gave her Grace Gryce's words.

It was well that Mary came, that way, and told a clear story about it all. What Tess told —when she came flying into the house and caught my mother around the neck and put her poor head on my mother's breast and went off into a passion of crying there—was such a muddle that my mother knew only that Grace Gryce had said something to her that was wickedly cruel. Tess cried and cried, as if she'd cry the very life out of her; and kept sobbing out that she was a sea upcast, and a nobody's daughter,

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and that the sea would have done better by her had it drowned her, and that she hoped she'd die soon and be forgotten—until she drove my mother almost wild.

And so it went for a long while with her, my mother petting her and crying over her, until at last—the feel, I suppose, of my mother's warm love for her getting into her poor hurt heart and comforting her—she began to quiet down. Then my mother got her to bed—she was as weak as water—and made a pot of bone-set tea for her; and pretty soon after she'd drunk a cup or two of it she dropped off to sleep. She still was sleeping when Mary Benacre came and told the whole story; and so stirred up my mother's anger—and she was a very gentle-natured woman, my mother was—that it was all she could do, she said afterwards, not to go straight off to Grace Gryce and give her a beating with her own hands.

VI

When Tess came to breakfast the next morning it gave me a real turn to look at her. Somehow, at a single jump, she seemed to have changed from a girl to a woman—and to an old

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woman at that. Suddenly she had got to be all withered like, and the airs that she used to give herself and all the pretty ways of her were gone. She just moped in a chair in a corner—she who'd never been quiet for five minutes together, any more than a bird—with a far-away look in her beautiful eyes, and the glint of tears in them. Sorrow had got into the very bones of her. “Dost think I really am come of such foul folk that I'm not fit for honest company?” she asked my mother—and if she asked that question once that morning she asked it a dozen times.

In a way, of course, she had known what she was all her life long. “My sea-baby” was my mother's pet name for her at the first; and by that pet-name, when most tender with her, my mother called her till the last. How she had come to us, how I had found her where the waves had left her and had carried her home in my little tired arms, she had been told over and over again. Sometimes she used to make up stories about herself in her light-fancied way: telling us that she was a great lady of Spain, and that some fine morning the great Spanish lord her father would come to Southwold by some chance or other, and would know

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her by the chain and the locket, and would take her home with him and marry her to a duke—or to a prince, even—in her own land. We'd see that she'd be pretending to herself while she told them to us that these stories were true, and I think that she did half believe in them. But it was not real believing that she had in them; it was the sort of believing that you have in things in dreams. Her love was given to my mother and to my father—and to me, too, though not in the way that I wanted it—and we were the true kinsfolk of her heart. On our side, we all so loved her, and made her feel so truly that she was our very own, that the thought of her being a nobody's child never had a chance to get into her mind. And her own fancies about herself—always that her own dream people were great people in the dream land where they lived—kept her from seeing the other chance of the matter: that they as well might be mean people, who would put shame on her should ever she come to know who they were. Into her head that cruel thought never got until Grace Gryce put it there; and put there with it the crueller thought that her being a nobody's child was what made John stand off from her, he thinking her not fit to be his wife.

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Tess was fearing, maybe, that even if John had not had that feeling about her he was like to have it after Grace had set him in the way of it. And maybe she was thinking, too, that if she had been hurt for the sake of him, and so deserved loving pity from him, it was Grace who for the sake of him had done the hurting—and that it was Grace who had won. Our girls are best pleased with the lover who fights to a finish some other man in love with them and well thrashes him. Tess may have fancied that John would take it that way; and so end by settling that Grace, having the most fire and fight in her, was the most to his mind. But what really came of it all with John, as far as I can make out, was that his getting them fairly set the one against the other cleared his thick wits up and brought him to a choice.

And so, being in every way sorrowful, Tess was like a dead girl that day; and my heart was just breaking for her. When dinner time came she roused up a bit and helped my mother, as she always did—though my mother wanted her to keep resting—and tried in a pitiful sort of way to talk a little and to pretend that she was not in bitter pain; but those pretty feet of hers, so light always, dragged after her in her

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walking, and she was all wizened - looking, and there were black marks under her beautiful sorrowing eyes. My mother helped to make talk with her, though my mother was wiping her own tears away when she got the chance; but as for me, I was tongue-tied by the hurt and the anger in me and could not say a word. What I was thinking was, how glad I'd be to wring Grace Gryce's neck for her if only she was a man!

After dinner I went out to a bench in front of our house, but a bit away from it, and sat there trying to comfort myself with a pipe—and not finding much even in a pipe to comfort me—until the sun, all yellow, began to drop down toward the Gun Hill into a bad looking yellow sky. All the while I had the tail of my eye bearing on our door, and at last I saw Tess come out of it. She took a quick look at the back of me, sitting quiet there; and then, I not turning toward her, off she walked along the edge of the cliff to the northward. At first I didn't know what to do—thinking that if she wanted to be alone I ought to leave her to her loneliness — and I sat on and smoked another pipe before I could make up my mind. But the longer I sat there the stronger my drawing was to go to her. What was hurting her most, as

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I well enough knew, was the thought of having neither kith nor kin for herself, along with the dread that even if she found her people they might only be a shame to her—and that was a hurt that having a husband would cure for her, seeing that she would get a new and a good rating in 'the world when she got her husband's name. And so, at last, I started after her to tell her all that was in the heart of me; and thinking more, and this is the truth, of what I could do to comfort her by taking the sting out of Grace Gryce's words than of how in that same way I could win my own happiness.

I walked on so far—across the dip in the land where the old river was, and up on the cliffs again—that I began to think she had turned about inland and so had gone that way home. But at last I came up with her, on the very top of Covehithe Ness.

She was sitting at the cliff-edge, bent forward a little with her elbows on her knees and her face in her hands; and as I came close to her I saw that she was crying in that quiet sort of way that people cry in when they have touched despair. I walked so softly on the grass that she did not hear my footsteps; but she was not put out when she looked up and saw me stand-

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ing over her—by which I think, and am the happier for thinking it, that she had not gone there of set purpose to meet with John.

“Sit thee down here, George. I’m glad thou’rt come,” she said, and she reached me her hand.

When I was on the grass beside her—she still keeping her hand in mine, as if the touch of something that loved her was a comfort to her—she had nothing to say for a bit, but just leaned her head against my shoulder and cried softly there.

The tide was out and a long stretch of the Barnard Bank lay bared below us, with here and there the black bones of some dead ship lying buried in them sticking up from the sands. Slicing deep in the bank was the Wreck Gat, with the last of the ebb running out through it from the Covehithe Channel and the undercut sides of it falling down into the water and melting away. At the edge of it was the sunken ship that had made it: the ship that had brought Tess to us from her birth-land beyond the seas. As I have said, no more of the wreck showed than her broken stern-post: a bit of black timber, all jagged with twisted iron bolts and weed-grown and barnacled, upstanding at one side of

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the channel from the water and not high out of it even at low tide. When the tide was in, and any sort of a sea was running, you stood a good chance of finding just where it was by having your boat stove on it: for then it did not show at all, except now and then in the hollow of the waves.

Tess was looking down on it, her head still resting on my shoulder, and after a while she said: "If only we could dig that ship up, George, we might find what would tell that I'm not come of foul folk, after all"—and then she began to cry again in the same silent sort of way. I couldn't get an answer for her—what she said hurt me so, and she crying on my shoulder, and I feeling the beating of her heart.

"It was good of thee, George," she went on again, presently, "to save the baby life of me; but it's a true truth thou 'dst have done me more of a kindness hadst thou just thrown me back into the sea. I'd be glad to be there now, George. Down there under the water it would make no difference what sort of folk I come of. And I'd be resting there as I can't rest here—for down there my pain would be gone."

My throat was so choked up that I had hard work to get my words out of it, and when they

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did come they sounded queer. "Tess! Tess!" I said. "Thou'l^t kill me dead talking that way. As if the like of thee could come of foul folk! A lord duke would be the least to be fit father to thee—and proud of thee he well might be! But what does it matter, Tess, what thy folk were who owned thee at the beginning? They gave thee to the sea's keeping—and the sea gave thee to me. By right of finding, thou'rt mine. It was I who found thee, down on the shingle there, and from the first minute that ever I laid eyes on thee I loved thee—and the only change in me has been that always I've loved thee more and more. Whether thy people were foul folk or fair folk is all one to me. It's thyself that I'm loving—and with every bit of the love that is in my heart. Let me make thee the wife of me, Tess—and then thou'l^t have no need to fret about who thy forbears were for thou'l^t have no more to do with them, being made a part of me and mine."

I talked at such a rate, when I did get set a-going, that my own words ran away with me; and I got the feeling that they ran away with Tess too. But when I had ended, and she lifted up her head from my shoulder and looked straight into the eyes of me, I knew by what

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her eyes had in them—before ever she said a word back to me—that what I wanted most in the whole world for myself I could not have.

It seemed to me an hour before she spoke, she all the time looking straight into my eyes and her own eyes full of tears. At last she did speak. "George," said she, "if I could be wife to thee, as thou 'dst have me be, I'd go down on my knees and thank God! But it can't be, George. It can't be! I've set my heart."

There was no doubting what she said. In the sound of her voice there was something that seemed as much as her words to settle the matter for good and all. Whenever I am at a funeral and hear the reading of the burial service it brings back to me the sound of her voice that day. Only there is a promise of hope in the burial service—and that there was not for me in Tess's words.

"It's John that's between us?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, speaking slow, "it's John." She was quiet for a minute and then went on again, still speaking slow: "I don't understand it myself, George. Thou'rt a better-hearted man than he is, and I truly think I love him less than I do thee. But—but I love him in another way."

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“Damn him!” said I.

That got out before I could stop it, but when it had got out I wasn’t sorry. It told what I felt then—and it tells what I feel now. John’s taking her from me was stealing, and nothing less. We were together when I found her, he and I; but I first saw her and I first touched her—and he gave me his share in her, though he had no real share in her, when he knew what my finding was. And so his taking her from me was stealing: and that is God’s truth!

Tess said nothing back to me. She only looked at me sorrowful for a minute, and then looked down again at the bit of wreck on the sands. By the sigh she gave I knew pretty well what was in her mind.

I’d had my answer, and that was the end of it. “I’ll be going now, Tess,” I said; and I got up and she got up with me. I was not feeling steady on my legs, and like enough I had a queer look on me. As for Tess, she was near as white as a dead woman, though some of her whiteness may have come from the yellow sunshine on her out of the western sky. Up there on top of the Ness we still had the sun with us, though he was almost gone among the foul weather yellow clouds.

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"Thou'l^t try to forgive me, George," she said, speaking low, and her mouth sort of twitching.

"I love thee, Tess," I said; "and where there's love there can be no talk of forgiveness. But John has the hate of me, and I tell thee fairly I'll hurt him if I can!"

With that I left her—there on Covehithe Ness, over the very spot where the sea brought her to me—and went walking back along the cliff-edge: and not seeing anything clearly because I was thinking about John, and what I'd like to do to him, and there was a sort of red blur before my eyes.

After a while I turned and looked back. My eyes had cleared a bit, but what I saw made them red again. Tess was not alone on the Ness. John was with her. The two stood out strong in the last of the yellow sunshine against a cloud-bank on the far edge of the sky. I suppose that Tess being hurt that way for him brought John to his bearings—making him love her the more for sorrow's sake, and for anger's sake making him ready to throw Grace Gryce over. Like enough he had been watching for his chance to get to her, waiting till I was gone. Anyway, there he was—and I knew what he was saying to her as well as if I'd heard the words. It is no won-

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der that the blood got into my eyes again as I started back along the path. But I did not go far. Somehow I managed to pull myself together and turn again. What I had to settle with John Heath could be settled best when he and I were alone.

VII

When Tess came home to supper that night she was all changed again: her looks gay once more, and her step light, and a sort of flutter about her lips—as if she was wanting to smile and was trying not to—and a soft look in her eyes that I never had seen there, but knew the meaning of and found the worst of all.

I couldn't eat my supper; and got up presently and went out leaving it—my mother looking after me wondering—and walked up and down on the cliff-edge in the darkness with my heart all in a blaze of hate for John. For a good while I had been looking for what I knew was in the way of coming to me; but it was different, and worse, and hurt more than I had counted on, when at last it came. Out there in the darkness I staid until the night was well on—not wanting for a while to hear the sound of

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Tess's voice nor to lay eyes on her. Not until I was sure, by the lights being out in the house, that she'd gone to bed, did I go in again. My mother was waiting waking for me. She came to me in the dark and put her arms around me and kissed me; by which I knew that Tess had been telling her—and knew, too, she always having looked to the wedding of us, that her heart was sore along with mine. But I could not bear even her soft touch on the hurt that I had. I just kissed her back again and broke away from her and went to bed. And in the very early morning, not having slept much, I slipped out of the house before either she or Tess was stirring and down to my boat and so away to sea.

What I was after was to get some quiet time to myself that would steady me before I had things out with John. I was not clear in my mind how I meant to settle with him. I did know, though, that I meant to have some sort of a fair fight with him that would end in my killing him or in him killing me—and I knew that to tackle him with my head all in a buzz would be to throw too many chances his way. And so I got away in my boat, at the day-dawn, to the sea's quietness: where I could clear my head of

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the buzzing that was in it and put some sort of shape to my plans.

Had I been in my sober senses that morning I never should have gone away seaward at all. Backing up the promise of the yellow sunset of the night before, pink clouds were showing in the eastern sky as I started; and as I sailed on in loneliness—standing straight out from the land on a soft leading wind from the south-west westerly—the pink turned to a pale red and then to a deep red, and at last the sun came up out of the water a great ball of fire. The look of the sea, too, all in an oily bubble, and the set of the ground-swell, told me plain enough—even without the sunrise fairly shouting it in the ears of me—that a change of wind was coming before midday, and that pretty soon after the wind shifted it would be blowing a gale.

I will say this, though: If I'd missed seeing the red sunrise—and all the more if I'd been full of happiness and my wits gone a wool-gathering—I might have thought from the look and the feel of the water, and from the set of the high clouds, that the wind would not blow to hurt anything for a good twelve hours. That much I'll say by way of excuse for John. Like enough he slept late that morning—through ly-

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ing awake the night before thinking what he'd be likely to think—and so missed seeing the sun's warning. When he did get away in his boat it was well past eight o'clock; and there was no man on the beach when he started, so they told me, to counsel him. And, all being said, even a good sailor—and that John was—starting off as he was to buy a wedding-ring might not look as sharp as he ought to look at the sea and at the sky.

As to my own sailing seaward—I seeing the storm-signals and knowing the meaning of them—I have no more to say than that I was hot for a fight with anything that morning, and didn't care much what I had it with or how it came. Anybody who knows how to sail a boat, and to sail one well, knows what joy there is in getting the better of foul winds and rough seas for the mere fun of the thing; but there is still more joy in a tussle of that sort when you are in a towering rage. Then you are ready to push the fight farther by taking more and bigger death-chances: since a man in bitter anger—at least in such bitter anger as I was in then—does not care much whether he pulls through safely or gets drowned. And so I went on my course seaward, on that soft wind blowing more and more lazily, until the coast line was lost

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in the water behind me: knowing well enough, and glad to have it that way, that the wind would lull and lull until it failed me, and that then I would get a blow out of the north-east that would give me all the fight I wanted, and perhaps a bit to spare!

But because I meant my fight to be a good one, and meant to win it, I got myself ready for it. When the wind did fail—the sun was put out by that time, and from high up in the north-east the scud was flying over me—I took in and snugged away everything but my mainsail, and put a double reef in that with the reef-points knotted to hold. Then I waited, drifting south a little—the flood having made half an hour before, and the set of the ebb taking me that way.

I did not have to wait long. Out of the mist, banked thick to the north-eastward, came the moaning that a strong wind makes when it's rushing down on you; then from under the mist swept out a dark riffle that broke the oily bubble of the water and put life into it; and then the wind got to me with a bang. There was more of it than I had counted on having at the first, showing that the gale behind it was a strong one and coming down fast; but I had the nose of my boat pointed up to meet it, and

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with no more than a bit of a rattle I got away close-hauled. There was no going back to Southwold, of course. What I was heading for was the Pakefield Gat into the Stanford Channel, and so to the harbour at Lowestoft; and I pretty well knew from the first that no matter how close I bit into the wind—and my boat was a weatherly one—I had my work cut out for me if I meant to keep from going to leeward of the Pakefield Gat in the gale that was coming on.

Go to leeward I did, and badly. When I raised the coast again, and a lift of the mist gave me my bearings, I saw that Kessingland tower was my landfall. As to working up from there to the Pakefield Gat—the edge of the gale by that time being fairly on me—I knew that it was clean impossible. I still had two chances left—one being to cross the Barnard by the Wreck Gat, and the other to round into Covehithe Channel across the tail of the bank. To the first of these the wind would help me; but I knew that even with the wind's help it would be ticklish work trying to squeeze through that narrow place at the half ebb—when the strong outset of the current would be meeting the in-pour of the storm-driven sea. It would be better, so I settled after a minute's thinking, to

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pass that chance and take the other — which would be a fairly sure one, though a close one too. And so I wore around—with a bad wallow in the trough of the sea that set everything to shaking for a minute—and got on my new course pretty well on the wind.

Just as I was making ready for wearing, and so had my hands full, I glimpsed the sail of a boat in the mist up to windward; and when I was come about she was abeam to leeward, showing her high weather side to me, not twenty yards away. Then I saw that it was John Heath's boat, and that John was standing up alone in her at the helm. Why the fool had not staid safe in Lowestoft harbour, God only knows. But it's only fair to him, again, to say that he must have got away from Lowestoft a good while before the wind shifted; and like enough he would have worked down to Southwold, and got his boat safe beached there before trouble came, if the calm had not caught him sooner than it did me—he being all the time close under the land.

VIII

Some of my rage had gone out of me in my fight to windward in the gale's teeth; but when

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I saw John close by me there it all came back to me. For half a minute the thought was in my head to run him down and sink him—and I had the wind of him and could have done it. Even in my rage, though, I could not play a coward trick like that on him; and before I could make any other plan up he set me in the way of one himself.

“I’m making for the Wreck Gat,” he sung out. “Give me a lead in, George—’tis better known to thee than to me.”

Had I stopped to think about it, his asking me to lead him in would have been a puzzle to me, he being just as good a sailor as I was and just as well knowing every twist of the sea and the sands. But I didn’t stop to think about the queerness of what he wanted—why he was for making things double safe by my leading him is clear enough to me now—because my wits were at work at something else.

While the words were coming out of his mouth—it all was in my head like a flash—I saw my way to settling with him, and to settling fair. He was crazy to want to try for it through the Wreck Gat on the half tide, with the run of the ebb meeting the onset of the breakers and a whole gale blowing. But his being crazy

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that way was his look out, not mine. I'd give him the lead in that he wanted—asking him to take nothing that I didn't take first myself, and giving him a better chance than I had because I'd be setting the course for him and he'd have only to follow on. That either of us would pull through would be as it might be. As to my own chance, such as it was, I was ready for it: knowing that I would be no worse off dead with him than I was living with him—and a long sight better off if I put him in the way of the drowning that would finish him, and yet myself won through alive.

That was what got into my head like a flash while he was hailing me, and mighty pleased I was with it. "Follow on," I sung out. "I'll give thee a lead." And to myself I was saying: "Yes, a lead to hell!"

"All right," he sung out back to me—and let his boat fall off a bit that I might draw ahead of him. As he dropped astern, and the uptilt of his weather rail no longer hid the inside of his boat from me, I saw that there was a biggish bunch of something covered with a tarpaulin' in the stern sheets close by his feet. But I gave no thought to it: all my thought being fixed on what was ahead of me and him

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in the next half hour. I was glad that we had to wait a little. Every minute of waiting meant more wind, and so a bigger fight in the Wreck Gat between the out-running current and the in-running sea. I had a feeling in my bones that I would pull through and that he wouldn't, and I was keen to see the smash of him as his boat took the sands. After that smash came, the rest of his life could be counted in minutes and seconds—as he floundered and drowned in that wild tumble of sand-thickened waves. So I'd have done with him and be quit of him; and would have a good show—if I didn't drown along with him—for winning Tess for my own. If I did drown with him, or if—not being drowned—Tess would have none of me, there still would be this much to the good: I'd have served him out for crossing me in my deep heart-wish, and I'd have made certain that he and she never could come together in this world alive.

All that I was thinking as I stood on ahead of him, bucketing through the waves that every minute were heavier with the churned up sand. And I also was thinking, and I remember laughing as the thought came to me, that there was a sort of rightness in the way things were work-

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ing out with us—seeing that the ship that had brought me my Tess, and the sea that had given her to me, together were making the death-trap for the man who had stolen away from me her love.

The wind was well up to a gale as we drove on together, me leading him by a half dozen boats' lengths, and from all along to leeward of us came to us through the mist a sort of a groaning roar as the breakers went banging and grinding on the Barnard Bank. Nothing but having the wind and the sea both with us, when we stood in for the gat, saved us from foundering; and yet that same also put us in peril of it, because we had a wide open chance of being pooped by the great following waves which came hanging over and dragging at our sterns.

The mist thinned as we got closer in shoreward, showing me the sand-heavy surf waiting for its chance to scour the life out of us; but also showing me Covehithe Ness, and Covehithe church tower off to the left of it, and so giving me the points that I wanted to steer by. As for the look of the Wreck Gat, when we opened it, the waves blustered over it so big, and were all in such a whirl and a fury with the current meet-

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ing them, that only a crazy man—as I have said—ever would have tried for it. Just about crazy I then was, and the look of it suited me. In that sea the narrow channel was so lashed by the breakers running off from the sands to windward of it that there was no sign of a cleft anywhere. No matter how we steered, getting through it would be just hit or miss with us—and with all my heart and soul I hoped that it would be hit for me and miss for John.

To make in, I had to bear up a little; and getting the wind by even that little abeam gave my boat a send to leeward that was near to doing for me. I was glad of it, though; because I knew that John would get that same send in the wake of me—and with more chance of its finishing him, his boat being a deal less weatherly than mine. And so—as I grazed the sands, and after the graze went on safe again—my heart was light with the thought that I'd got the better of him at last.

There was no looking back, though, to see what had gone with him. All my eyes were needed for my steering. Everywhere about me the sand-heavy water was hugely rising in a great roar and tumble; and as for the sands under it, and there the worst danger was, it was

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just good luck or bad luck about striking them—and that was all that you could say. Twice I felt a jar under me as the boat went deep in the sea - trough; but I did not strike hard enough to hurt me, and I lifted again so quick that I did not broach - to. And then, when I thought that I was fairly through, and had safe water right ahead of me, there came a bang on the boat's side—as the sea-trough took me down again—that near stove me: and right at the side of me, so close that I could have touched it as I lay for a second there in the deep wave-hollow, was the stern-post of Tess's sand-bedded ship rising black out of the scum and foam. One foot farther to leeward and the jagged iron of it would have had me past praying for. But it did no harm to me—and as the water covered it again I shot on beyond it into what seemed to me, after the sea I'd hammered through, almost a mill-pond on the lee side of the bank.

Then I could use my eyes to look behind me: and what I saw will stay fixed in them till the copper pennies cover them and I see with them no more.

In spite of his send to leeward at the start, John had come through after me without taking the ground; but he had gone farther to leeward

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than I had, and so was set—when smooth water lay close ahead of him—fairly in death's way. As I looked back I saw only the bow of his boat, with the scrap of sail above it, riding on the top of an on-coming wave. Then the boat tilted forward, and came tearing down the wave-front at a slant toward me, and I saw the whole length of her: and what burned my eyes out was seeing Tess there, standing brave and steady, the two hands of her gripping fast the mast.

It was not much more than a second that I had to look at her. With a sharp sound of wood splintering, that I heard above the noise that the sea was making, the boat struck fair and full on that iron set timber—and then the wave that had sent her there was playing with the scattered bits of her, and the sand-heavy breakers were tumbling about the bodies of the two that she had borne.

If the sea meant to give me back my dead Tess again, I knew where I should find her—and there I did find her. On the shingle under Covehithe Ness she was lying: come to me there at the last, as she came to me there at the first, a sea upcast. That last time she was all mine. There was no John left living to

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steal her away from me. And if she was not mine as I wanted her, at least she never was his at all. In that far I had my will and way over him, and for that much I am glad.

And so, she being all my own, home along the beach for the second time I carried her. It was a wonder to me, as she lay in my arms, how light she was—and she so tall!

THE END

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